



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

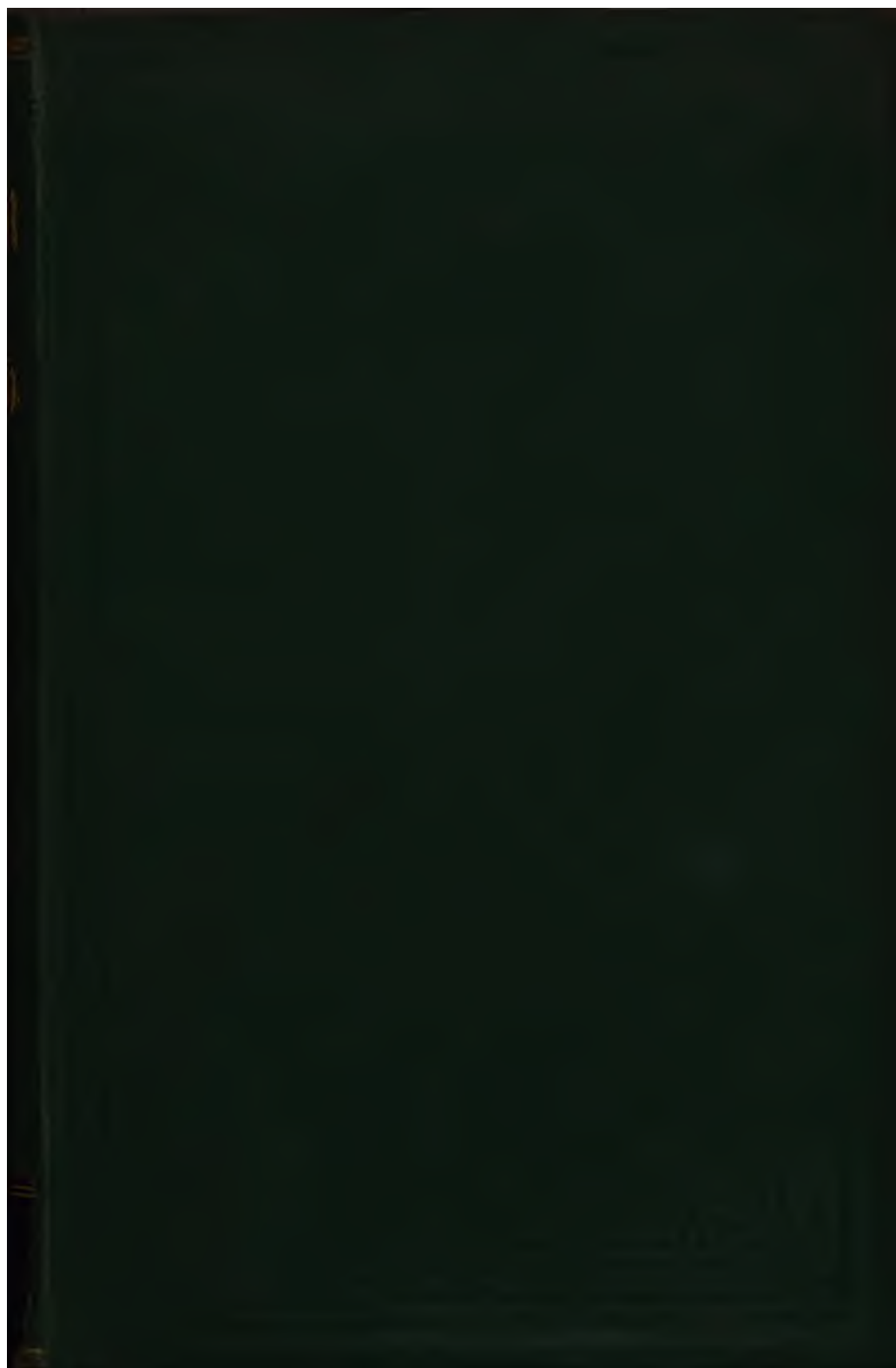
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

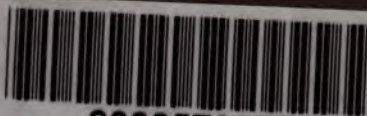
We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

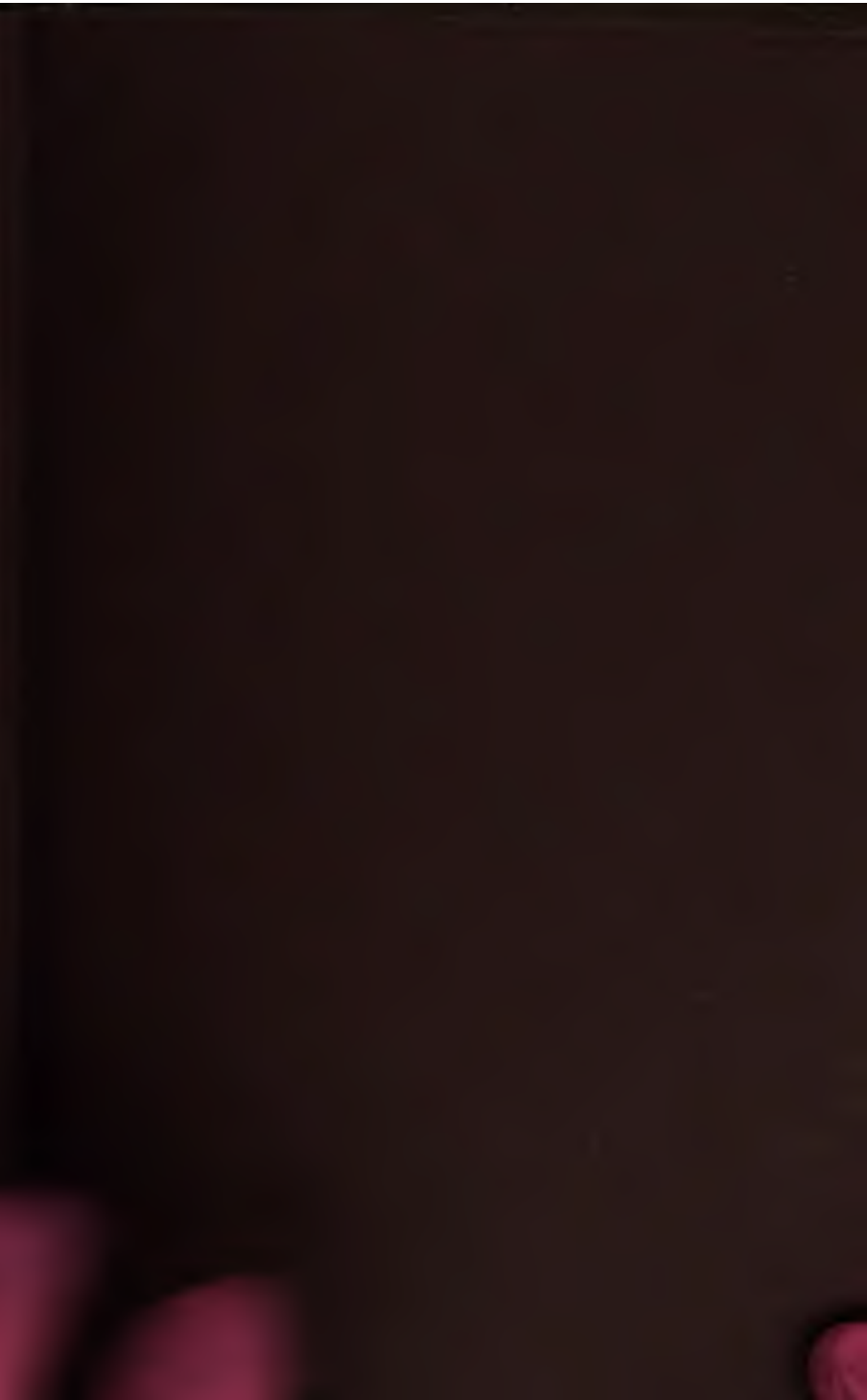
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



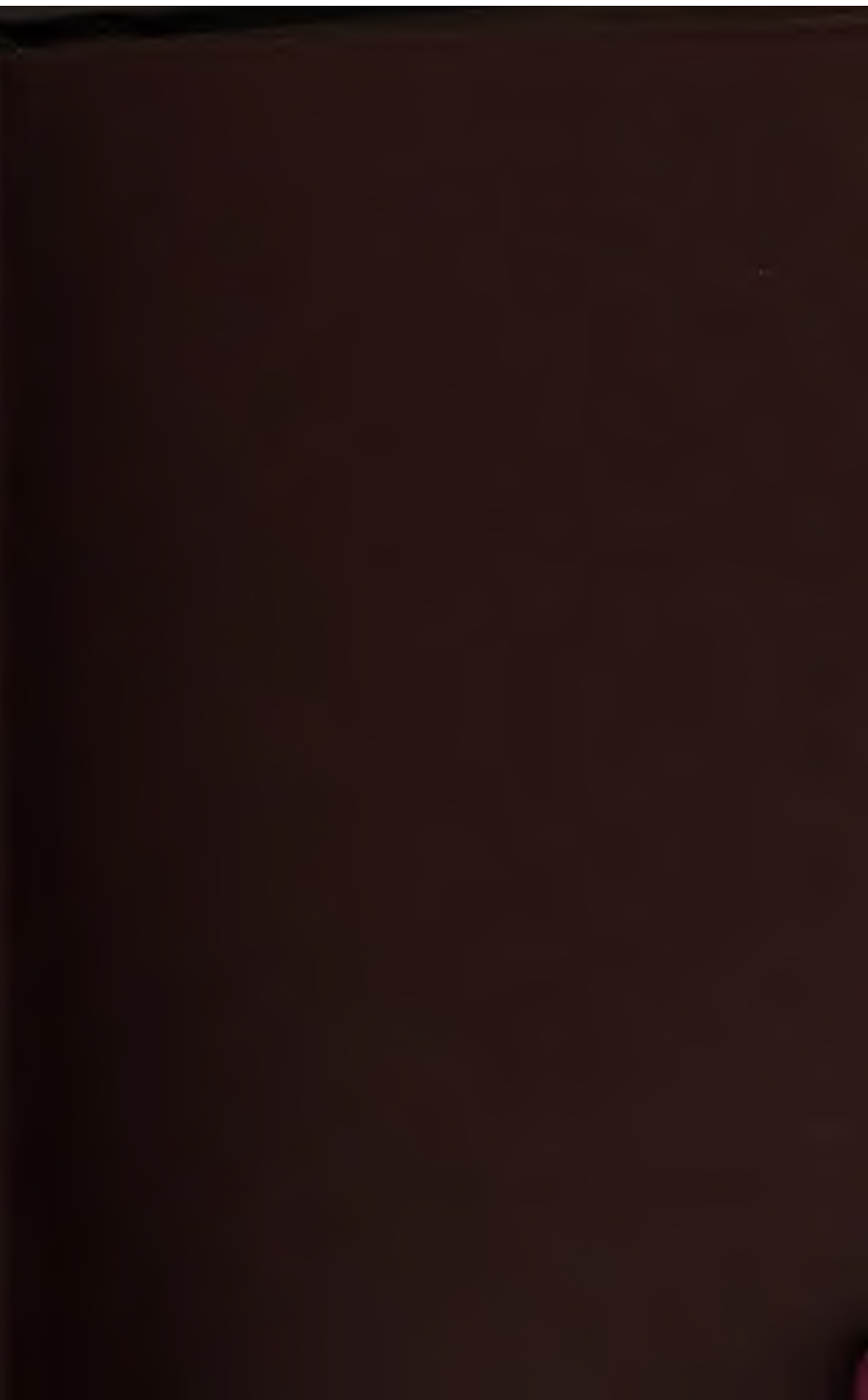


600057827Z





600057827Z



1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and the role of the accounting department in ensuring the integrity of the financial statements. It also highlights the need for transparency and accountability in the reporting process.

2. The second part of the document outlines the various methods used to collect and analyze data, including surveys, interviews, and focus groups. It emphasizes the importance of using a mix of qualitative and quantitative techniques to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

3. The third part of the document presents the results of the study, which show a significant positive correlation between the variables being investigated. The findings suggest that the proposed intervention could have a beneficial impact on the target population.

4. The fourth part of the document discusses the limitations of the study and suggests areas for future research. It also provides a conclusion and a list of references.

5. The fifth part of the document is a summary of the key findings and a list of references.

CARRY'S CONFESSION.

VOL. I.



CARRY'S CONFESSION.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"HIGH CHURCH," "NO CHURCH,"
"OWEN: A WAIF," "MATTIE: A STRAY,"
&c. &c.

"How many among us at this very hour
Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves,
By taking true for false, or false for true."
TENNISON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1865.

The right of Translation is reserved.

250. u. 201.



LONDON:
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE,
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

CONTENTS

OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER	THE GALBRAITHS.	PAGE
I. FIFE STREET		3
II. MR. GALBRAITH		24
III. CARRY		39
IV. MORE OF THE WEBBER FAMILY		60
V. NEAL GALBRAITH BEGINS BUSINESS		82
VI. MR. TRESSIDER		101
VII. FELLOW-CLERKS		111
VIII. SPECIAL SERVICE		133
IX. AN ANTI-CLIMAX		150
X. ADDIE		168
XI. MRS. HIGGS GIVES A HINT		187
XII. NEAL'S BIRTHDAY		204

BOOK II.

A STRANGE COURTSHIP.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A HAPPY NEW YEAR	225
II. NEAL MAKES AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE	254
III. BARRIERS IN THE WAY	269
IV. GLOBE COURT	291
V. A FLASCO	320

B O O K I.

T H E G A L B R A I T H S.

VOL. I.

B

CHAPTER I.

F I F E S T R E E T.

MRS. HIGGS had been marketing in the London Road, Southwark. A brisk woman, who would not have lost time over her business transactions had it not been for less methodical people, who crowded the shops and harassed the shopkeepers on this Saturday night in question.

It was a busy night, London Road way; wages had been paid, and there was money to spend for Sunday dinners, and for Saturday drains at the pewter-covered counter of the "Alfred's Head." Trade was flourishing Southwark way; they were in full work at the iron-foundries, pin-factories, and hop-warehouses about there; nobody was out of work, or out on strike; provisions were plentiful, and not too dear; the working-classes were doing well—too well, some

people said, for the spring-van excursion business was a great success that summer, and the publicans had never had such times !

Why, the working-classes could have oyster suppers at the corners of the streets, and take Monday to themselves, and pay ready money at their bakers ; and one workman in the neighbourhood had been known to bank money ; but then *he* lived at the back of Bethlehem Hospital, and the prospect might have turned his head a little.

Mrs. Higgs lived at the back of the Bethlehem Hospital also—at the bottom of one of those quiet, shady, shabby streets, branching out of St. George's Road—and having done her marketing, after some fight for places, and haggling for prices, was wending her way homewards, with a basket, a brown-paper parcel, an umbrella, and a latch-key.

It had begun to rain—just as Mrs. Higgs had prophesied it would rain to her next-door neighbours, and to the dressmaker with the cough over the way, previous to sallying forth in search of supplies—and the wind had risen unpleasantly fierce, and was troubling the skirts of the prophetess as she turned the corner of Fife Street.

"I knew what it would be," she said, sharply; "it's always the way, if I leave it till Saturday. And what business have I to leave it till Saturday, now the lodgers have gone? I ought to have known better!"

The wind had Fife Street all to itself until Mrs. Higgs's arrival. Fife Street possessed no thoroughfare, and terminated in a blank high wall, which was more than extra lugubrious that August night; and, to Mrs. Higgs's fancy, seemed to keep the wind in the place on purpose to aggravate her.

Battling her way through adverse elements, with basket on arm, parcel of groceries pressed to her bosom, latch-key on her little finger, and umbrella vibrating and flapping ominously above her, Mrs. Higgs reached her doorstep, shorn of all its whiteness by the "slush"—and Fife Street was more than extra slushy in wet seasons.

It was not till she had lowered her umbrella, and was presenting her latch-key like a pistol at the door, that Mrs. Higgs became aware of an intruder on her doorstep—a dark figure, with its arms crossed, and a hat cocked forwards on its nose.

"Is that you, Joe?"

"Joe!—no."

"Then please get out of this," she said, sharply, after recovering from a little jump at the propinquity of strangers. "You can't stop on people's doorsteps, blocking up the way like this. You must go somewhere else. I've nothing to give away—I never have had. I'm sorry for you—but you *must* be off, young man."

A second glance had assured her that the intruder was a young man—the light from the lamp over the way shone upon a white-faced, dark-haired youth, who had roused himself at her direct appeal.

"Are you Mrs. Higgs?"

"That's my name, sir—well-known in these parts; thirteen years come Friday next, the twenty-fust."

"Thirteen years!—so long as that, now?"

"And if you've anything to say to me, whose name is Higgs, be quick about it, please. You should know better than to waste your time at your age."

"Right enough, Mrs. Higgs—I should know better—I hope I do," said he, leaving the doorstep

for the pavement. "Open the door, please, and let us proceed to business at once."

Mrs. Higgs drew back suspiciously, and put her latch-key in her pocket.

"I haven't lived thirteen years in London, not to know the tricks on it by this time; and one or t'other of you are always up to something. You don't think I read the newspapers for nothing?"

Mrs. Higgs spoke with extraordinary rapidity she was a sharp woman, who was not to be imposed upon at her time of life.

"You're afraid of thieves?"

"I don't know that I'm afeard of 'em," was the quick rejoinder; "and certainly not thieves of a whipper-snapper sort, as you may be, for what I know. But if you've anything to say to me about the lodgings, or if you've come from Mr. Webber, why, say it here, please, and don't keep an old woman in the rain."

"But I've a good deal to tell you—and I've come a hundred miles to tell it, Mrs. Higgs. My name is Galbraith."

"Gord bless me, child!—you don't mean that!"

The brown paper parcel was slipping down-

wards, when she made a clutch at it, dropped her umbrella, and shook up a host of things in her capacious basket.

"Gal—Galbraith! Then you're Master Neal?"

"To be sure. *The limb* that was, thirteen years ago."

"And not the limb that is; or you're no credit to my master," she said, plunging with her latch-key at the door; "come in, Master Neal, and let me see how you have altered all these years, and whether you're like your handsome father, whose quite well, I hope? And what brings you here at this time o' the night, at your age, in this drefful London?" she said, opening the door, and passing into the dark cavernous passage. "This way—mind the step—I'll get a light in a minute. Of all the odd contigimies of life, why, this is oddest! I was only thinking of you just now, coming up the street in the wet!"

She had thought of the Galbraiths, father and son, every day for the last thirteen years, for the matter of that; but the coincidence was not the less remarkable to her. Neal Galbraith stepped into the passage, closed the door, and shut himself in with the darkness, standing with his back

to the wall, waiting for Mrs. Higgs's summons to advance.

The signal came at last, after much "dratting" of refractory matches, and pattering of agile feet about the room; and then the young traveller entered a plain, but neatly-furnished parlour, where a candle was beginning to sputter upon the centre table. The lady of the house advanced towards him, with two hands, cased in cotton gloves, extended. The youth placed his hands within them, and shook them heartily.

"To think that after all these years——," she said.

"After all these years—to think of it," was the somewhat dreary answer.

"You can't remember me, Master Neal?"

"I catch the likeness somewhere—but I was only six years of age, you know."

"Ah!—to be sure—no more. How you've grown!—I shall see you better by-and-bye, when the light burns up. You've rather dazed me by flopping in like this!"

"Make quite sure of me, Mrs. Higgs," he said, laughing; "I may be a pickpocket, or a burglar, after all."

“Oh! I know the ring of the voice; and there’s likeness enough in you to keep the worrits down. Now, let us have the news—take a chair, please—not that one in the corner, Master Neal—the last lodger broke that, flinging it at his wife, the ruffian! I’ll be ready for you before you’re settled down quite.”

Mrs. Higgs tossed off bonnet and shawl, folded the latter with a quick roll of her hands, and placed the former with it on a chair, set down basket and parcel, skipped into the passage with her umbrella—after becoming cognizant of “drips”—skipped back again, and dropped into a chair before her visitor.

Face to face thus—two figures, whose parts are not minor ones in this story—let us sketch them hastily.

Mrs. Higgs, a woman of sixty years, and remarkably agile for them; quick in her movements; spare and short of figure; having no superfluous flesh wherewith to encumber her—a thread-paper kind of woman, harassed, as we have seen, in windy seasons of the year. A woman with a lined, even a grave, face—the face of one who had seen trouble, and surmounted

it by hard fighting and patience. For there were clear grey eyes, that looked unflinchingly at things ahead still—and thin lips, that were compressed together when silent, and were indicative of a will of their own, should occasion necessitate it. A face that had brightened very much during the last ten minutes, and was looking its best that night.

And the visitor who had come a hundred miles to see her? A youth of nineteen years of age, tall for his age, loose-limbed and angular after the fashion of his years, black haired, black eyed, and sallow faced. It was a face worth looking at, for all that—stamped with an intent, eager expression, seldom seen in so young a man—the face of one who had begun the world early perhaps, and was already armed *cap-à-pie* to battle with it. He wore his hair somewhat long, and brushed back off his forehead and behind his ears, in an eccentric fashion, that seemed to disavow all facial disguise, and leave room for the play of features far from immobile. Altogether a strange-looking, and not bad-looking youth; verging on “interesting,” let us hope, or we may as well shut our desk and give up the subject, for the hero of this story—poor fellow! poor hero!—has al-

ready stepped from the side-scenes to the footlights.

"And so you're Master Neal turned up again?" said the woman, after facing him sometime in silence, with her hands upon her knees and her head bent forwards; "it brings the old times back, the sight of you."

"I wish it did!"

Yes, Mrs. Higgs was a sharp woman in her way, for the change in Neal's voice suggested a suspicion, and his change of countenance confirmed it.

"Not in trouble—*him*?"

"No, I don't say that—you mustn't say that," said the youth quickly, "when you see him presently."

"Is he in London, then?"

"Yes—at an hotel, awaiting my return."

"And then—go on, child—you're very slow of your age. I'd be shamed, if I was you, of getting on so slowly."

Master Neal smiled at the reproof.

"I had forgotten what a good bustling soul you were, Mrs. Higgs," he said apologetically; "but then it is thirteen years ago, you say?"

"Thirteen year come Friday week the twenty-

fust, since I got married like a fool," said the precise woman; "them Fridays are unlucky days, I'm 'clined to think sometimes."

Mrs. Higgs had a peculiar habit of chipping off the first syllables of long words, and launching the latter headless into argument; at six years of age Master Neal had incurred her grave displeasure by mimicking this weakness—he seemed better mannered now.

"You don't like long stories, Mrs. Higgs, and I'm fond of cutting them short myself, though you mayn't think so, at present. Well, we've come to grief."

Mrs. Higgs clasped her hands silently together, and stared more intently at our hero. She understood his *argôt* perfectly; there are some slangy phrases that tell their stories accurately at least, and save a string of fine words. They go straight to the "white" like an arrow.

"Come to grief!—ah!"

"It was our bad luck, you see—" said this youth lightly, perhaps a trifle too lightly to be genuine, "and down we dropped like a stone, and here we are!"

"And nobody to tell *me* of it. It's funny!"

"Ah! it *is* funny. I've been laughing all the way to town about it, Mrs. Higgs."

"And that's impudence—and you can keep *that* to yourself. We get lots of that in Fife Street."

The youth reddened at this second reproof, looked grave, and then went on again.

"You must not be too hard upon me yet—presently, I shall get used to you—he always was. I can't expect you to be affected much by our reverses—you've had troubles of your own, I've heard."

"Who told you?"

"My father."

"My troubles didn't concern him, any more than yours concern me, Master Neal—and yet he liked to hear them. Go on with yours."

"Oh! I'm not going to say much about them, Mrs. Higgs," he answered quickly; "I've come for advice; we don't know anything about London, and we wan't cheap—very cheap apartments."

"We'll talk about 'em presently. How did you come to grief—you and him?"

"Easily enough. He was never a rich man—just able to jog on comfortably in a country town—nothing more."

"A 'tented man—what ailed him sudden-like?"

"One of his ideas. You know how clever he was?"

"Good lor! the mess he made about the house with his 'ventions—yes!"

"Ah! but he wasn't a fool, or a man with the ghost of ideas, Mrs. Higgs. You know that?"

"I don't know anything about his ideas—I've seen wheels going round, and smelt a sight of nasty oil, in his workshop—that's all."

"He discovered many things—patented them—hoped to make a fortune from them. He was very clever, Mrs. Higgs!"

"What do you keep saying *was* for?"

"I'll tell you in a minute. He hoped to make a fortune from one discovery in particular, and he didn't, that's all!"

"Why not?"

"Because Tressider stole his patent—went to law with him for rights he never possessed—tired him out by law—made the victories which my father gained by law but another step towards his ruin—pushed on from court to court, with appeal after appeal—a millionaire, conspiring to defraud

my father of his independence—and he broke him, madam, by force of money, and brought an honest man to ruin—the thundering thief!”

Neal Galbraith had warmed during this hurried recital, and forgotten the capacity of his listener; he spoke in a loud voice, with his chest heaving, his eyes flashing, and his hands clenched tightly. At the last he opened one hand, and brought it down flatwise on the table, to give due effect to his withering peroration.

“Ah! yes—you’re a limb still!” Mrs. Higgs commented, after another jump of alarm. “I see, you came to grief, as you say; how will you get out of it?”

“It’s all over, that attempt. I am about to take office in London—turn clerk—anything. I’m going to take care of the old dad!”

“You!—a boy?”

“A man, Mrs. Higgs! Bless your soul, I’ve been a man these two years!”

“Oh! have you?” was the doubtful query.

“I’ve kept him up—fought for him—been housekeeper, maid-of-all-work, son, and *keeper*. You know him well—he was never made for wear and tear, for *much* trouble.”

"Perhaps not—who is?"

"And I've found—no matter how— a place in London. Eighty pounds a year to begin with—is not that a *man's* wages?"

"Seems good pay," was the quiet observation here. "How long they'll think you're worth your money's, doubtful."

"I think I shall be worth it," was the proud reply. "Why, I'll work hard. I'm not a fool—I'm strong—I see my way!"

"Nothing like a good 'pinion of yourself. I've got one too, and it never did me any harm. It keeps me strong yet. Nothing like making the best of it, whatever it is, and turning good out of it, if you can. But *you* can't!"

"Why not?"

"You're fretful, rather—fidgety, and all of a work, like a pail of *east*! Bless your heart, boy, *I* know every turn of *you*."

"No, you don't."

"I don't say that you're a bad sort—the Galbraiths I knew never was, father, mother, or son. And the mother—*now*!"

"Ah! it don't seem for the best that she should

have died so early," was the mournful comment here.

"There!—what did I tell you just now?"

"I don't repine—I'm not complaining," was the quick answer.

"She died—for the best! A lady born—my mistress, who took part of my heart with her into her grave!" she said, with the first true utterance of feeling escaping her, "would have been one more to work for in these hard early days of yourn."

"Would I have cared for that?"

"I'm speaking of the extra wear and tear, that's all. But *him*—your father—can't he help himself?"

"Not much—not at all," was the grave response.

"Sorry for it. I think I see it all. Now, what shall we do?"

"Ah! that's the question!"

"You want 'partments—cheap ones—very cheap?"

"Yes, for a beginning. I hope——"

"Keep to the 'ginning, please—we'll settle that first. I've a parlour and two bed-rooms to let;

you'll be a help to me; I shall be a help to you—mutual 'commodation and no favour!"

"But——"

"I've kept that bill in the window till it's fly-blown—times are hard with me too, Master Neal."

"Ah! you want to help us. I was afraid of that when I came here," cried the youth. "You who have been a faithful servant in the better times, would go out of the way for us now, and put us under obligations."

"I'm too old to be foolish—I'm glad to get lodgers, whoever they are. I would rather have those I know, than those who mayn't pay their rent, or 'pose upon me. So you can bottle up that pride, and bring your father with you."

"You must never speak to him as if he were poor, as if he were dependent upon ME. You must bear with him, for he's greatly altered, and a bad temper will try him very much."

"I'm a little sharp, at times, when put out, like other people. You needn't give me all these warnings, child."

"Pardon me, but he *is* weak—not like his old self in anything. You will understand that, in good time."

"I'll try," was the dry response.

"And don't talk about his inventions—above all, his losses, mind that, please."

"I'm not likely."

"And now, what's the rent of your apartments? Let me see the rooms, and go to business in a proper manner, Mrs. Higgs."

"Well, we *have* been going on anyhow," she said, taking up the light, and subsiding into the landlady. "This way, please, *sir*!"

Mrs. Higgs led the way from room to room. A sitting-room on the first floor, and two bed-rooms on the second, scantily furnished, and of small dimensions enough, but clean and wholesome, and devoid of London smells. Master Neal's face seemed to pale more and more at the prospect, but he kept firm, and faced his landlady with an unmoved aspect.

"I suppose all London rooms are about the same, at this rent?"

"A little wus, sometimes—better sometimes, *sir*."

"We can't afford more money this year. Ten shillings a week, you say?"

"I can't take a farthing less."

"I'll have them. Shall I give you a deposit?"

"If you please."

Master Neal paid his deposit, and, relieved in mind by the business character of the latter portion of the interview, took his departure, promising to return with his father in an hour. Mrs. Higgs hoped that he would not be later, as he went out of the narrow passage into the dark street.

In rather less than an hour, when the sheets were aired, and Mrs. Higgs had finished bustling about the upper rooms, the rattle of cab-wheels awoke the echoes of Fife Street. Mrs. Higgs was at the door, shading the candle with her hand from the heavy draught, as the Galbraiths, father and son, came towards her, and the driver began hauling at the boxes on the roof.

The father walked somewhat feebly towards the house, and was assisted by the son. The son erect and firm, and proud of his charge; the father bowed a little by the grief that had come to him, a grey-haired gentleman, below the middle height, who walked slowly, and with difficulty. Mrs. Higgs threw up her hands spasmodically at the sight of him, and nearly shook the candle

from its socket on to the wet pavement; before the action could be noticed she was the brisk, matter-of-fact landlady of No. 15 once more.

"This way, gentlemen—mind the scraper."

Mr. Galbraith, senior, looked up at her as he advanced, and from the travelling cloak he wore held forth a palsy-stricken hand.

"Old servant—old friend," he muttered in a weak voice, that was almost childlike in its tone, "you'll help us?"

"When you can't help yourselves," was the brisk, cheery answer, "which won't be yet a while, I know! Now, mind the step," she said, taking the outstretched hand, and assisting the old gentleman gently forwards—"people not used to it always come head-first into the passage; now then, sir, one, two!"

"Thank you, Mrs. Higgs. It's like old times to hear your voice. Neal," in a low whisper, "I feel better."

"To be sure, sir."

Up-stairs into the front room on the first floor, where Neal unfastened his father's cloak, and

placed him in the easy-chair before the table already laid for supper.

“ There, father—home at last !”

“ Ah ! that’s well.”

CHAPTER II.

MR. GALBRAITH.

NEAL GALBRAITH, hero, was awakened the next morning by a tapping at the panels of his door. He had come a long journey yesternight, had been harassed by luggage, search for Mrs. Higgs, choice of apartments, &c., and was still sleeping, when his landlady ventured to arouse him.

“Who’s there?” he cried at last.

“Only me, Master Neal,” was the response without; “I thought you might like to know it’s getting on for church-time.”

“Oh!—thank you,” after a pause.

“You might like to begin London life in a proper manner, I thought; but if you’re tired just for once——”

“No, I’ll be up in a minute. Don’t talk so loud—you’ll wake the old gentleman, and he seldom

gets up before twelve o'clock. I say, I forgot about Sunday's dinner, and all that."

"I didn't."

"You're a good friend, Mrs. Higgs; but I knew that before, or I shouldn't have come to Fife Street in search of you," he answered from within—"what a selfish scamp I am!"

"You're in better spirits than you were last night."

"I always am good-tempered in the morning. This is a queer blind of yours. I'm hanged if I can draw it up, Mrs. Higgs!"

"There's a knot somewhere in the blind cord; when you get over that——"

"All right—so we Galbraiths overcome difficulties. Hollo! what the deuce is this?"

There was a long pause, and Mrs. Higgs on the landing waited very patiently and hazarded no answer.

"Here, I say, Mrs. Higgs!"

"I'm going downstairs now, sir, to see about your breakfast. I'll talk as long as you like another time."

"Yes, but wait a moment; what place is this at the back here?"

"That's the hospital, Master Neal. It's a fine building, ain't it?"

"Ye—es."

Master Neal made no further reply, but sat cross-legged and scantily apparelled on the cane-bottomed chair, looking out of the window at the prospect.

"Cheerful," he added, *sotto voce*, after a long ruminative stare; "and lucky for the old gentleman that I gave him the best room as his due. I suppose it's Bedlam—it looks like it. By George! what a nice prospect for a low-spirited *man*, which I am not, at all events. Nineteen—going on for twenty, and in low spirits!—pooh, it's not natural!"

Neal dressed, and descended to his sitting-room on the first floor, where breakfast awaited him. On Mrs. Higgs's first entrance, he said:

"I'm afraid we shall give you a great deal of trouble, Mrs. Higgs."

"I'm used to it!"

"My father always has his breakfast taken up to him; and although I can manage it on Sunday mornings, yet——"

"It's gone up, Master Neal. I haven't forgotten his ways."

"But these are new ways?"

"I fall into them."

"I'm glad I've come here, though it is a dull street with a madhouse at the back," said Neal;

"I scarcely remember you myself, still I've heard so much of you from *him*."

"Pity he hadn't anything better to talk about!" was the sharp response.

"And when mother died, and before the other trouble, he missed you more than ever."

"I know that."

"He wrote to you to come to him?"

"I couldn't. I'd a home to mind, and a husband to see after *THEN*."

"Yes, I remember."

"Now, put on your hat, and go to church. Young men who don't go to church of a Sunday always turn out wrong."

"Oh! then—I'll go," he said; "look after my father when he first comes down—he'll soon settle here, and want no looking after. He's strong in his way—you'll see that, Mrs. Higgs."

Neal Galbraith went to church, and Mrs. Higgs stood at the door and watched him down the street.

"I declare he *is* nearly a man," she muttered ;
"and to think he was a 'racious baby a'most when
I saw him last ! And to think that his father has
been fool enough to lose all his money, and come
down to Fife Street !"

The man who had been fool enough to lose all
his money, entered an appearance at half-past
twelve o'clock, in the sitting-room of the Gal-
braiths. He came shuffling downstairs, with one
hand on the banisters, and entered the room with
a weak, vacillating step, like one to whom the
ground was strange yet. A little, thin-faced
man, with keen grey eyes and a disproportionate
forehead; a man that was all forehead, which troubled
you with its demonstrativeness, and made your head
ache to look at. A man old-fashioned in attire,
with gilt buttons to his dress-coat, and a voluminous
frill to his shirt, clean for the occasion, as befitted
the day—or as befitted the new life, which deserved
clean linen as a start off.

He bowed to the landlady, who had heard him
descending, and was in the sitting-room before
him.

"Good morning, Mrs. Higgs."

"Good morning, sir."

"Where's—where's Neal?"

"Gone to church, sir, like a good youth."

"Like a good young man!" corrected the father, drawing a round snuff-box from his pocket, and opening it; "a young man who will prosper in life, and be a credit to me. He's told you—all, I suppose?"

"Oh! every word, sir. There's no occasion to repeat it."

"If it wasn't for him, I shouldn't care this pinch of snuff, Mrs. Higgs," he said; "but I did hope to see him start in life a gentleman. I gave him a gentleman's education, and I did my best."

"Nobody 'putes that. And he'll be a comfort to you—I see it in his face."

"I thank you for that opinion, because it's a good and true one; and you were always quick to see the best or worst of us. You see the best of him."

"He has his tempers—hot ones, I suppose. I always fancied that he'd never grow up into a man, but bust suddenly into 'turity."

"He has no tempers, except good ones."

"He don't show them to you, at any rate, and that's like a good son."

"He ought to have ridden in his carriage, Mrs. Higgs, but right was wrong, or wrong got the best of right, and every time I proved my honesty I added to my expenses, and then—the smash came!"

"Yes—yes, I've heard all that."

"Tressider did it," said Mr. Galbraith, beginning to shake with agitation, as she had seen him last night when he tottered feebly to his new estate, "he wouldn't let the matter rest—he had made thousands of pounds out of the patent, and he wanted to make more, and to prove his claim to it; and so he lied and robbed, robbed and lied, and set others on to do the same, until I lost my money—then my wits!"

"But the wits came back, and perhaps the money will."

"They let me go at last, and Neal took care of me, till I got strong and well again. Why, I'm not an old man now—and it will all come round again, Mrs. Higgs, and I shall be a comfort to that boy, instead of a clog round his neck for life. Don't—don't you think that I shall get as strong as ever?"

"To be sure you will."

"But all the money's gone except fifty pounds a-year."

"Then *that* can't trouble you much."

"And some day, when I get very strong in the head, I shall think of something else, and—oh! no, no, no, I'll invent nothing more. Invention brought me down to this; I mustn't think of anything again."

"I'd think of taking a little walk before dinner."

"I never go without Neal."

"Would you like to read?"

"I never read now—it makes my head ache."

"Then I wouldn't sit here all of a heap. Why don't you stand at the door and watch for your son coming home from church."

"Thank you, Mrs. Higgs—I think I will."

"You can see all up the street."

"Well, really, that's very kind of you to say so."

The old gentleman found his way downstairs a few minutes afterwards, and took up his position at the place assigned him. Fife Street way, people were partial to standing at their doors in summer-time, more especially the non-church goers, who

had leisure. Sunday evening was quite lively in consequence, and Sunday morning was not to be complained of. The workman at the engineer's, who never went to church, and rented a pair of parlours lower down, sat on the doorstep that day in his Sunday's best, and kept watch over a sturdy little boy who toddled up and down the pavement with a go-cart; the milliners over the way, who slept late on Sundays, came to the door about a quarter to one, dressed like countesses, and took stock of the passing world; and a few slouching youths, with yellow sticks with hooks to them, knocked about a ball until Mrs. Higgs tapped at the window and told them through the glass that they ought to be ashamed of themselves—an assurance that narrowed their sphere of action for the next five minutes.

Church over, and the potman yelping from door to door; the few devout folk Fife Street way—it was a very undevout street—returning home, and glancing *en route* at the new lodger whom Mrs. Higgs had found; the idle boys sent off to the baker's for the Sunday joints, and coming home with careful steps and smoking dishes; Neal Galbraith, with his head very erect, and with a martial

kind of tramp, quite out of place in Southwark, at last advancing homewards.

Mr. Galbraith brightened up at the advent of his son.

"Keeping a look out, father?" said Neal, as he approached; "that's well. Come for a little walk, sir, if you feel inclined. You know more about London than I, and can show me the nearest way to the City. To-morrow, you remember, I am City bound."

"Eh?"

"You remember, City bound."

"To be sure. My memory's very good," he said brightening up; "I think I will put you in the way, Neal."

The old gentleman was assisted down the step by the son, who drew the father's arm through his and walked away with him. Mr. Galbraith was very feeble, and his strength soon failed him; but his son ignored the fact, with a cleverness and tact beyond his years. Father and son, whose positions were reversed in life, might have appeared true father and son, master and pupil, to an observer at that time; for Neal was thoughtful, and worked upon a theory of his own.

They stood at the end of the street in the St. George's Road, arm-in-arm, looking first towards Westminster, and then in the direction of the "Elephant and Castle." In the full glare of the daylight, the bewildered expression of this old man was pitiable to witness.

"I—I don't think I remember anything about—this place."

"Ah! you were an east-ender, a thorough east-ender in your younger days—of course, you can't know much about Southwark," said Neal; "put you in the City, and I'll warrant you find your way blindfolded."

"I'll warrant that too, Neal," with a chuckle of self-satisfaction.

"What a beautiful day,—why, there's as fine an air here, father, as in old Sussex. We shan't miss the cottage much—you won't, at least, for you're a man of the world, and a philosopher; and I, taking pattern from the father, will settle down—oh! in less than no time."

"That's right, Neal. You must keep strong, my lad. Old people can bear trouble with more patience—it's natural—but you young restless men cannot, always."

"Ah! but there's some one to look after *me*. When you see me drooping, or getting low-like, you will shake the horrors out of me with a strong hand. I've only you to lean upon—hold up, sir—steady!"

"I didn't see that drop in the road," said the old gentleman, apologetically; "they manage the pavements very badly, Southwark way. I often think that the whole principle of paving streets is wrong, Neal—why shouldn't there be——"

"Ah! why shouldn't there be," said Neal, hastily; "if every parish had its—its sense about it—eh, sir? But it hasn't; and it's no business of ours. I wouldn't trouble my brains about any plan, to benefit so thick-headed a community as parish folk. I——"

"I know where we are!" cried the father, suddenly, and with the delight of a child at the discovery; "I've got it all as plainly as possible."

"That's well."

And the son looked as delighted as his father at this evidence of "locality."

"Why, this is St. George's Road, Surrey-end, Neal," said the old gentleman, with great volubility; "and that's the Cathedral, where there was

a fuss about a steeple they were going to have, and didn't; and this is Bethlehem Hospital, where they would have shut your father up, if you hadn't held fast to him."

"Well—and which is my way to the City?"

He turned his father's back upon the hospital; but the old gentleman looked over his shoulder at it, with a scared expression.

"And perhaps I might have got better in it—more quickly, Neal. It's a nice-looking place enough—I'm not afraid of it!"

"Afraid!—I should think not; now you're as strong as ever, almost. Well, would you go down *there* as a short cut?"

"God bless me, boy—no! That's Joiner Street, and only leads into the Westminster Bridge Road again. Look here—you've come wrong. Your nearest way from *home* would be the other way, down London Road, and the Borough—or, stay a moment, there's a cut off opposite, to the Blind School—I remember now; only I wouldn't take it in winter time, because they are a rough Irish lot about there, and quarrelsome, when the money's scarce. He! he!" with a wild little croak, "who isn't?"

"Not quarrelsome—you and I, at least. We don't fight much!"

"God bless you, boy!—*you!*"

"Not but what I hope you'll thrash me confoundedly, every time I talk like a gentleman, or look like a fellow who wants to kick over the traces!"

"If you only had your old pony to ride to office upon!"

"Oh! I'm past ponies—I should snap them in half. And as for that skittish little beast I had once, why, it would have shied at the first omnibus, and pitched me into the river, perhaps!"

"God bless me, yes! It's a very good job we've parted with it, Neal."

"Ah! it just is!"

Conversing thus, turning, by an artful twist of conversation, regrets into expressions of satisfaction, Neal Galbraith led his father back to Fife Street. They returned home in good spirits, and the father fancied that the world was brightening round him once again. Neal was young and strong; he had begun life in earnest, but his charge was no clog upon him, for he had ever honoured his father. This father, so weak now, had been a good man,

a man of genius, a man to respect as well as love; and Neal had been of an affectionate disposition, and a favourite. He had been spoiled a little; he had his weaknesses—he might have been less proud at times, and could have dispensed with a fair degree of irritability; he was not exactly the real Neal Galbraith then—only an impostor; but his heart was in the right place.

Where it was, and what it was like, and how it stood “wear and tear,” we shall see for ourselves in due course, for Neal Galbraith was born unto trouble!

CHAPTER III.

CARRY.

MRS. HIGGS went to church in the afternoon. Morning and evening when free from lodgers; with her house full, and lodgers to attend to, afternoon preferred. She went out in a scanty drab silk, that displayed a pair of stout double-soled boots, and a bonnet of quaker "leanings," that fitted tightly to her head. In this guise, she took a leap off the step to the pavement, and went off to her devotions at a canter.

"You'll not be worried by visitors," she said to Neal and his father, at the drawing-room door, before departure; "the milkman don't come afore five; and there's no one likely to call to see me, though I ain't a lone woman. I've some 'pectable 'lations near the London Road, and well they know it, surely!" she added, with a slight tinge of acerbity hovering about her peroration.

"Well, if the respectables come, I'll show them in, at all events, Mrs. Higgs."

"No; let them knock, for coming at unseasonable times," said Mrs. Higgs; "and serve them right! It is'n't for a Galbraith to be a-opening my door."

"Why, didn't you know that mine was a footman's place in the City, Mrs. Higgs?"

"I don't like frivolity on a Sabbath," she snapped; "but as much fun as you please of a week-day, Master Neal."

"Oh!"

Mrs. Higgs departed, after reprimanding her junior lodger; and the senior lodger went to sleep in the arm-chair near the window. Mr. Galbraith, senior, got through a deal of sleep in a day; he was always drowsy after his early dinner; and as he woke up clearer and better, Neal tolerated his father's somnolency.

"It will do him no harm," the doctor had assured the son; and so the old gentleman slept to his heart's content.

Neal wandered about the room on tiptoe for a while, then looked out of window, then sat down at the table, with his elbow thereon, and his

hand supporting his head; and went in for "a good think" at his prospects. After all, not so bad as might have been; something to be thankful for, after all these storms, that had stranded them on the rocks of a new world. They had not sunk in deep water—all hands had not been lost. There had floated to shore some waifs and strays of the cargo, and he had set to work with a will, directly the shock had been recovered from.

It had happened—the crisis—when he was sixteen years old. It had been going on for five or six years before; but he had been at boarding-school, and the truth had been kept from him; and at sixteen he was scarcely old enough to go thoroughly into the subject. Then his father's illness had made a man of him suddenly; and for nearly two years he became his father's guardian, and aged wondrously. He grew very stern and thoughtful for his years when his father's absence took away the necessity for acting; he had mastered the whole story of his father's ruin then; and he could see in it nothing but legal quibbling, injustice and tyranny.

As his father went off to sleep that Sunday

afternoon, so the real Neal Galbraith rose slowly to the surface—a grave-looking, heavy-browed, young man, with a resolute face, that was startling in its intensity.

After all, not so bad as might have been! That was his thought, but his features did not brighten at it then; it was doubtful, looking at him, if he were really contented or thankful. There he sat, stern, and silent, and hard; his black eyes fixed before him at a future that did not make them sparkle much, and with the hand upon his knees clenched forebodingly. It was a different character to the youth whom we have seen hitherto; we shall know him better presently.

He went off to sleep with that moody expression of countenance—it even deepened more in his slumbers, and gave him quite a bravo-look; for his slumbers took him into the thick of life's battle; and fancy surrounded him with enemies, hacking and hewing at his pride. It was a distorted picture of his future indignities; and he suffered from it, and fought his way out of it, into real life again, with a start, and sat up, rubbing his eyes.

“I can tell them it was for his sake, not for

mine, I asked a favour!" he muttered. "Why, I would have starved first. They shall see that!"

He leaned back, and composed himself for a second nap, undisturbed by the dream-figures that had affrighted him. He shook himself away from his last thought, however, by a hasty—"No, they mustn't see it, and take a dislike to me. That's not wise;" and then his head was nodding forwards for the second time, when a long and incessant knocking at the street door brought him to consciousness for good.

"By George!—that's row enough for one!"

It was row enough for fifty, for the matter of that. The windows rattled in their fragile sashes, the furniture vibrated, and the house rocked gently to and fro. Mr. Galbraith, senior, flung out arms and legs galvanically, and bounded from his chair to his feet, on which he stood trembling.

"Was that a knock?"

"A little one," said his son, drily.

"I was dreaming of a new boiler principle, safety principle, Neal, that couldn't go wrong; and I was showing it to Tressider—just fancy, Tressider!—when it burst into fifty-thousand pieces, and blew us all to Heaven!"

"That was the knock—which brings us down to earth."

"And whilst I was going up—in pieces, too, Neal!—every bit of me seemed to say: 'Well, that serves Tressider right, at all events!'"

"Oh! confound Tressider; we've done with *him* for good. Tressider was a scamp of the first water, and there's an end of him! You and I can afford to look down into the abyss where he grovels with his ill-gotten wealth."

"Yes, yes; we were in the right. We—there's the knock again, I think, Neal."

"Well, I rather think there is. Sit down—it's no one we know, and it's no one Mrs. Higgs cares about, so let him knock on for his impudence."

Neal laughed, and motioned to his father to sit down; Mr. Galbraith dropped into his chair once more.

"I fear that London is a cool place, father," he said; "I am going to teach myself to bear events with extraordinary equanimity, not to be surprised or put out at anything. That's the way to take the ills that flesh is heir to with composure; you and I have been a little too excitable and passionate, and the world got the better of us in con-

sequence. After this, the coolness and glassiness of Wenham Lake in the cold season; the—hang it, if I can stand this row!—I'll just give that fellow a piece of my mind!"

Neal went from the room with huge strides, and leaped the stairs a flight at a time, thereby alighting on the passage mat with celerity. The knocker was in full career still; he gave an impetuous tug at the lock, and flung back the door, bringing thus suddenly into the passage a well-dressed young lady, who had clung tenaciously to the knocker to save herself from falling.

"Well, I'm sure!"

"I beg your pardon. I—I wasn't aware that it was a young lady who wished to rouse the street—that is, to call here—and nobody at home."

"No one at home?" was the question somewhat archly put.

"That is, nobody of any consequence," Neal stammered; "and I've no doubt it's all a mistake, for only Mrs. Higgs lives here."

"I wish to see her. I'm Miss Webber."

"Are you indeed?" said Neal, expressing the

greatest surprise, and still far from composed at the young lady's advent ; " will—will you leave any message ?"

" No, I'll wait for aunt. I want to see her very particularly—I suppose she has only gone to church, sir ?"

" That's all."

" Then I will wait."

And Miss Webber swept past our hero into the parlour, leaving Neal to close the door after her, and proceed up-stairs again. Neal did so, perplexed at this sudden feminine raid on the establishment, and somewhat doubtful as to the wisdom of his steps in permitting a stranger to enter Mrs. Higgs's apartments on the mere plea of being Mrs. Higgs's niece. And yet there was nothing to steal in Mrs. Higgs's parlour but a stuffed canary under a glass shade, and that had been unduly stuffed into a dropsical yellow bird, whose identity was doubtful, and whose value was doubtfuller. Besides, the very idea of imagining that young lady to have arrived there with a felonious plot in her head, was not to be credited for a moment—only by a young fool like him, with his country head full of thoughts of London thieves. And what a pretty girl she was !—

agitated, perhaps, and red about the eyes certainly, as though she had "come to grief" in *her* turn; he wondered what was the matter, and why Mrs. Higgs did not make haste home and see?

"Have you ever heard Mrs. Higgs speak of a niece?" he asked his father, whom he found wide-awake and erect on the edge of his chair.

"Ne—ver."

"She has relations—London Road, somewhere; she said so herself before she went to church."

"Oh! did she? Well, then, there is no doubt about it, Neal, for that woman wouldn't tell a falsehood to save her life. She's an extraordinary woman—with such a memory! What's that?"

"Oh! that's the niece again—why, she's crying now."

"Then something's the matter."

"Don't be alarmed—it can't affect us. We can't be bothered by other people's troubles as well as our own. That won't do."

"No, no, Neal—that will never do, lad."

Consoled by the son's assertion, Mr. Galbraith lay back in his chair, and proceeded to compose himself again. Neal sat by the table, and grew uneasy in his mind, for all his assumed coolness of

demeanour. When his father had dropped soundly into slumber, he walked to the door and listened, and became more uneasy still.

"I don't like this!—I can't bear to hear a girl crying!" said Neal to himself; "I never heard it before, and it curdles my blood abominably. I wonder what she's fretting about, and whether I can find her anything to stop it? I—I think I'll tell her that her aunt won't be long now. She'll hurt herself in a minute if she goes on like that. Whew!"

Neal went downstairs again, and knocked softly at the parlour door. Receiving no reply, and disturbed by the passionate sobbing from within, he turned the handle of the door and entered. Miss Webber was sitting at the table, with her arms outspread and her head resting upon them, her bonnet crushed somewhat out of shape by her abandonment to grief, and some fair brown ringlets crushed with them, but looking none the worse for their disorder.

"I beg your pardon," said Neal, "but she'll be back soon."

Miss Webber, aroused to a sense of decorum by the intruder's voice, sat up and stared at Neal. A

fair picture of a spoilt beauty at that moment, her eyes red with weeping, her ringlets showering in any fashion about her face, until they were thrust hastily back by two gloved hands ; her bonnet off her head, and only saved from falling by its strings, tied in a bow, which had got round to her left ear.

“She!—who’s she?”

“Mrs. Higgs—your aunt—you need not cry about her being out.”

“I’m not crying—I’ve not been crying about her. What do *you* want?” she added sharply—so sharply, that Neal gave a little jump backwards at her vehemence.

“I don’t want anything particularly,” explained Neal; “I didn’t like to hear you going on—that’s all.”

“It’s the heat of the weather,” said Miss Webber, smoothing her hair rapidly again; “and I have had a dreadful headache—and I don’t see that it’s any business of yours, sir, if I were *going on* a little.”

“No, but it wasn’t a little—and my father, you see, Miss Webber, had just dropped off to sleep.”

"Oh! and you were afraid that I should disturb *your father!*" interrupted Miss Webber; "my aunt's lodger, I presume?"

"Yes—your aunt's lodger."

"I'm very much flattered by your interest in my sorrows," said the young lady, almost verging into acrimony, "and good afternoon."

"Good afternoon, Miss Webber."

Our hero bowed himself out; there was a feeling of extinguishment, as he told Mrs. Higgs afterwards, overpowering him, and he had not impressed Miss Webber by his polite attention. He went upstairs to his father, and shut the door of the drawing-room cautiously behind him. If Miss Webber felt inclined to "go at it again," she must indulge her idiosyncrasy, for he should not interfere any more. He even felt inclined to consider that he had been treated with contumely—snubbed by Mrs. Higgs's niece, and looked down upon by that young lady for being Mrs. Higgs's lodger. That was a good joke to a Galbraith—but he must expect rare joking in his new estate!

Meanwhile, Miss Webber, roused from mental prostration, unfastened her bonnet, took off her silk mantle, and then, standing on tiptoe before the glass

on the mantelpiece, set herself thoroughly to rights—looking in that position, and at that time, pretty and *petite* enough, and being impressed with that conviction herself, as was evident from her admiring glances. Miss Webber was still engaged in self-inspection, when Mrs. Higgs's latch-key rattled in the front door, and Mrs. Higgs, with characteristic agility, entered an appearance in the front parlour, before her niece could dart away to the table.

"What! are *you* here, Carry?" exclaimed Mrs. Higgs, "and staring in the looking-glass to 'muse yourself till I come back again—well, I *do* hope you've spent a pleasant arternoon."

"Don't talk like that, please," said Miss Webber, angrily; "I have quite enough of that at home, aunt."

"Enough of what, child?"

"Of that hard, disagreeable talk, which makes me hard and disagreeable myself," said Carry; "father and mother are both happy in that style of conversation—and now, you——"

"Hush, gal!—speak better of your parents than that."

"How do they speak of me?" was the rebellious rejoinder.

"I don't know—I don't care much—p'raps you're not kind and 'siderate enough, and they feel it in their way."

"They're—they're," she repeated after a spasmodic gulp, that stopped her utterance for an instant, "not kind and considerate to me, and you may tell them that I said so, aunt, if you like. They're old and unsympathetic—they don't understand me—they don't make allowances for my youth and their age, but keep me down, and hold me to their ideas of what is right or proper. *It ain't proper!*" she cried in scornful mimicry of some one whose maxims she evidently contemned, "nothing's proper but being tied hand and foot and listening to hard words."

"There, that'll do, Carry," was the remark here; "if you want a friend in Aunt Higgs, or think that I can be one to you—which is doubtful—don't go on like that."

"As if Joe wasn't warning enough to them—Joe, who went wrong because—because——"

"'Cause he couldn't go right, and it wasn't in his natur, poor boy. Don't talk of that racketsy godson of mine, or lay his sins at your father's door. He's best away, and you're best at home

to make 'mends for all the trouble that he has brought."

"They bore their trouble well, then," said Carry, still resentfully, "they didn't fret about him. Aunt, they were glad to get rid of him, I think."

"Speak of what you know, gal, and you'll save yourself heaps of lies," was the blunt aphorism of the old lady, taking off her bonnet and shawl meanwhile. "Now, what's the matter? You'll go on about anything 'cept the right thing—just like you!"

"Shall we have tea?" suggested Miss Carry; "I've come on purpose to have tea with you, aunty."

"And to ask a favour of me."

"Just a little one," stealing her arms round Mrs. Higgs's neck, "which will not hurt you much, or put you much out of the way, and may make me—oh! so happy! I'll tell you all at tea."

"Well, we may get tea over before the gentlefolks ring for theirs," said Mrs. Higgs, softening very much.

"Gentlefolk!—"

"My new lodgers—once my old master and my

master's son—'duced in the world by law, my dear."

"The Galbraiths, whom you served once?"

"To be sure."

"How very strange! And I've been rude to the son already."

"How's that, now?"

"He heard me crying here, and came down-stairs to tell me to make less noise, or something, and I think I snubbed him."

"Very likely," was the dry response; "well, he'll get over that in time."

Mrs. Higgs bustled about the room, set the tea-things, ran for the hot water, came back with her Sunday tea-pot—she had an especial tea-pot for Sundays as well as a bonnet—and was soon at the head of the table, hostess for the occasion, a hard-faced woman, with motherly eyes—eyes that betrayed her, through a mask of equanimity.

"Now, Carry, though Sunday's a bad day for 'plaints, let's have 'em, and let's laugh at 'em."

"Oh! there's nothing to laugh about."

"You're a child of seventeen, with a child's

troubles—when you're a woman, Carry, and look back at this, you'll laugh too."

"Seventeen's rather old for a child, Aunt Hannah."

"I've known children at seven-and-twenty—
orful ones!"

"We'll say that I'm a child," said Miss Webber, taking up that side of the argument with alacrity, "children should not be hipped to death and kept at home from every little pleasure. You have heard me speak of Miss Jennings?"

"Yes."

"She and I have just left school; it's her birthday next week—she's eighteen—her father gives her a little party at her Richmond villa—she sends me an invitation, and I mus — mus — mustn't go!"

"And that's all you've got to worry about, then?"

"Isn't it enough, aunt, for a child?"

"For a child fond of showing herself off in her best things—yes."

Miss Webber did not wince at this reply; she desired an *aide-de-camp*, and relied upon her aunt's advice. She did not give up the contest yet.

"I haven't answered the note of invitation at present, although they are very firm—awfully firm," she added, with a little shudder, "at home."

"And you are foolish enough to think that I can help you?—turn your father and mother away from what they think is best for you?—move the obelisk in the London Road to t'other side of Blackfriars Bridge?"

"They won't give way before you, but afterwards they may think it over, and alter their minds."

"You know your father's set 'gainst company keeping?"

"Yes."

"And your mother?"

"Yes."

"Then what makes you so *very* anxious about this birthday party of Miss Jennings?"

Miss Webber coloured beneath the intent gaze directed towards her, and betrayed, for an instant, some evident confusion.

"It's very dull at home—oh! so dull, dear aunty," she said; "I have not seen any one of my own age since I've left school—I'm not allowed to see anybody, ask anybody, go anywhere! At one

time it's the expense, at another it's the impropriety, and I'm miserable."

"You were tired of school, they said—they took you from it."

"I wish I had been kept at school all my life, now."

"You never were of one mind long together—fond of change, fond of pleasure, fond of yourself!"

"Like a child, aunt!—when I am a woman I will sober down. Till then, *you* will not be hard with me?"

"Well, no."

"And you'll speak one word for me?"

"Well, yes—on one 'dition, child."

"What condition is that?" asked Carry Webber, suspiciously.

"That if I fail, you'll 'tent yourself with home, and with them who think it good that you should bide in it. I'm not so certain that it's not the best place for you, or that gadding about will make you any happier. I'll do my best, and, failing—you do yourn."

"I'll try," was the half-reluctant response, "there—I'll try."

"That's better, Carry—trying makes one strong. Then to-morrow——"

"Oh! you'll come back with me to-night, aunt."

"Not of a Sunday night, to get worriting about parties."

"They don't study Sundays——"

"But I do—as well as I am able, with lodgers and—nieces. Leave it till to-morrow night."

"There'll be the horrid business then—and people calling—and all kinds of annoyances!"

"I said to-morrow, Carry," and Mrs. Higgs looked too firm and decisive for her niece to attempt any further argument. Carry took her tea with more complacency after that, even became a new and very different Carry—a lively, laughing girl, more bright and glowing for the April shower of that afternoon. She had won her aunt to her wishes, and winning a friend to her side was to give her hope of that little party at Richmond, on which her heart was set. She was in the best of spirits when the lodger's bell rang; and when the lodgers went away to church after their tea, father and son together, she watched them from behind the machine lace window curtain, and criticized them in a laughing fashion.

“What an odd couple!” she said; “what a funny old man, aunt—why, he walks on tiptoe! and what a funny young man, too, with his hair going backwards over his head like a cockatoo!”

“Don’t make game of them, Carry,” reproved her aunt once more; “*my* friends!”

CHAPTER IV.

MORE OF THE WEBBER FAMILY.

THE Galbraiths, father and son, had departed churchwards about an hour, when the Fetch of Mrs. Higgs made its appearance in Fife Street, and went up the one step of Mrs. Higgs's residence. Having heralded its advent by three solemn dabs on Mrs. Higgs's knocker, it crossed a pair of rusty black gloves on a still rustier black silk dress, and awaited a response.

Mrs. Higgs, opening the door promptly, found her Fetch in position on the door-step.

"Hannah?" said the Fetch, slowly.

"Johannah!" was the quick reply of Mrs. Higgs.

"Caroline is here, I s'pose?"

"Yes, she is."

"If I didn't think as much!"

The Fetch walked into the parlour, leaving

Mrs. Higgs to close the door, and follow her. Caroline Webber looked at her mother, half timidly, half rebelliously.

"I call these pretty goings-on, Miss Webber," said the visitor; "walking in and out of the house when you please, and without any warning, and frightening the lot of us to death. It ain't proper in a gal of your age, and I say 'No' to it for one!"

"I wished to see aunt."

"Did I ever debar you seeing your aunt, Miss Webber?" asked the mother, spreading out her rusty gloves, palm-wards, towards her daughter; "has your father or me ever thought ourselves too grand for Hannah, or been anythink but kind and good to her?"

"Never too grand for me!" said the voice of Mrs. Higgs, behind them; "and that's a blessing, anyways!"

She sat down by the side of her sister, who had sunk slowly into a chair by this time; and the difference between the sisters was more apparent then. Mrs. Webber was an outline figure of her sister—a washed-out counterpart. Mrs. Higgs was short and spare, but Mrs. Webber was shorter

and sparer; Mrs. Higgs's face was thin and lined, but Mrs. Webber's was pinched and haggard—a face not pleasant to look upon, in its maturity, though it had been pretty enough once, people said. It was a reduced likeness of Mrs. Higgs's face, without that something in the expression which people liked in Mrs. Higgs. A beggar might have solicited alms of the one in fear and trembling, but he would have never asked of the other, had poverty's grip been of iron, and he above pretences.

“I know what you've come here for,” said Mrs. Webber to her daughter; “you think that we're to be talked over again by your aunt, like we was once, more's the pity!”

“Why the pity, Johannah?” quickly asked Mrs. Higgs.

“It led to harm—it never did a mite of good; we set him up in business for the fourth time, and he went to the dogs, as nat'rally as ever.”

“Ah! poor fellow!”

“He's not worth pitying—a rip!”

“You say that as well as Mr. Webber, then?”

“I always did—why shouldn't I say it, Hannah?”

“His mother—oh! good Lord! if I had been his mother——”

“Which is indecent, talking before a young gal like Caroline,” reproved Mrs. Webber; “and had better be stopped. We ain’t used to such improper gabble in Shepherd Street.”

“Has anything put you out to-day, Johannah?” Mrs. Higgs asked quietly.

“I’m never put out, Hannah—I demean myself too well for that.”

“Business—though it ain’t a day to talk of business—going on tidily?”

“More tidilier than ever, thank you,” was the firm reply.

“I’m glad to hear it. I was afraid of ’verses by your looks. Nothing *is* wrong, then?”

“Except in this gal of mine—growing wilful and perverse with every day, after all the money we have spent upon her. Don’t teach her to be above her station, or too proud for her family, or too fond of pleasure-taking, Mr. Webber said himself to the guvness; and if she ain’t been and taught her all three, along with the other finishings!”

“I’m not above my station—I’m not proud—I

do not seek pleasure, only comfort," said the daughter.

"That'll do, Carry," said Mrs. Higgs, detecting the defiant tone in her niece's voice; "only comfort, which you'll always find, if you keep patient. Now look here, Johannah, I'm your sister, and can talk to you better nor I can to Mr. Webber, who's rough and snappish when you 'gest a thing to him."

"He never had any feeling for anybody," muttered Mrs. Webber; "and though you needn't backbite my own husband to me, it's gospel truth you've said, for that matter."

"Now look here," said Mrs. Higgs, with her usual rapid utterance; "Carry's seventeen years of age, and odd, and wants a little change—just a little—from Shepherd Street, to keep her from moping and moaning. You and I was gals once, and liked change—no one better than you, Johannah, before you took to Webber—and gals can't feel like old women, and fall into old women's ways, all of a heap. Lor, we shouldn't like to see them, if we could; and as for pleasure, why, if it's going to a little buff-day—that's pleasure—the sooner the poor gal's out of the world the better."

"Go it, Hannah! Set her against her own mother—that's like you!"

Mrs. Higgs flinched at the accusation.

"I hope not," she answered, quickly. "I'd like to see her always dutiful and good, a blessing to you both. If you say 'No' to this, why, I hope she'll say 'Very well,' and make the best on it. If you say 'Yes,' I hope you'll find that it wasn't much to say to 'blige me, and that it helped to make the lot on us more 'fortable. And if I haven't forgotten all about its being Sunday, too!"

"Our minds—Webber's and mine—are quite made up about these Jenningses people," said Mrs. Webber, decisively. "It isn't often we agree upon anythink, but on this we're set—the two on us. The Jenningses are a gay, flyaway lot, and it isn't as if they was any other people one could put up with better. They're a theayter-going people, though I don't object to theayters in reason—they're going to have a theayter next week built a-purpose for them at home, because they can't have enuf of it out. They're people spending all their money, and too bad a lot for my gal to get thick with."

"You did not say anything about a theayter, Carry?" said Mrs. Higgs.

"It's a little piece, I believe, that they think of performing amongst themselves. If I hadn't been so foolish as to speak of it, I might have gone, perhaps."

"Not to those Jenningseses; they like to do things fine, and spend money—we like to do things humble, and save money. All the better for you, Miss Webber, when it pleases the Lord to take us out of Shepherd Street."

Mrs. Higgs, a judge of human nature, or of her sister's nature, gave up the effort to soften Mrs. Webber. She saw the futility of further pressing the matter, and turned quickly to the other side of the question, for her niece's sake.

"And all the better, Carry, that you shouldn't mix too much with these gay folks, p'raps; they might turn you 'gainst your home, and fill your head with lots of nonsense. I don't 'ject to change for you—a little on it; but when you go out of your spear to find it, it may do harm. You couldn't have asked 'em back, you see, and what's the good of obligating yourself to——"

"I'm not going!—it's settled. I don't want to

talk or think any more of it," said Miss Webber, severely.

"You're not very much 'pointed, Carry," said Mrs. Higgs.

"'Pointed or not, nobody cares,' said Miss Webber, somewhat ungratefully taking up the weak portion of her aunt's English. "Mother, I don't want to stay here any longer—let us go home."

"It's a pity you ever came out," said Mrs. Webber, rising. "Good night, Hannah."

"Good night, Johannah."

"It's a pity," added Mrs. Webber, "that you've interfered, and made things wus, Hannah; but it was a habit of yourn when you was young, and you don't seem likely to grow out of it."

"Too old for much change, Johannah. Good night to you again."

Mother and daughter departed, and Mrs. Higgs stood at the door and watched them down the street.

"The wust of it is," she soliloquized, "one don't know with that Carry whether she's doing right in sticking up for her—she's an uncommon gal, not over-thoughtful—bad in some

things, and good in some things, very. Just the gal—God help her!—that may come to harm if the devil gets at her first; and may sober down and make a good wife and mother some day, if the right man turns up. I hope he will, poor gal!—or it will be that Joe's story over again, only ever so much wus, as it must be when a gal runs wild. But she won't—and I'm an old fool to maunder on like this!"

She watched them up the street, into St. George's Road, intently, and yet dreamily. She was thinking of them still, when they were half a mile away from her, and had met Neal Galbraith and his father coming from church arm-in-arm together.

Neal raised his hat to the pretty-faced girl, who blushed at the attention, and smiled and bowed in return. Mrs. Webber, before Neal was out of hearing, gave vent to a sharp, "Who's that?"

"That's Aunt Higgs's new lodger, and his father, Mr. Galbraith."

"A counter-jumping sort of young man *he* is," commented Mrs. Webber; "and his name's Galbraith. Why, that's the name of your aunt's old master!"

"The old gentleman was aunt's master—he has lost all his money."

"Serve him right!—he should have known at his age how to have held it tighter. I daresay he was fond of theayters, and sotting away his time in a public-house, or fond of company, or somethink. If ever a man's fond of company, Miss Webber, he makes a mess of it."

"Mr. Galbraith was never fond of company, that we have heard," said Carry, speaking angrily once more.

"We haven't heard anything to the contrary that I am aware on."

Miss Webber did not care to reason with her mother; she had entered her protest against being "talked at," or against Mr. Galbraith being made an example, for her behoof; after that, she relapsed into a silence which her mother made no effort to disturb. At the broad roadway near the "Elephant and Castle," and making for the London Road, Mrs. Webber's attention became too absorbed in the "crossings" to notice a sudden start of her daughter, a sudden recognition of someone or something in the crowd of people flitting to and fro.

Proceeding along the London Road, Mrs. Webber asked once what Carry was looking behind her for, and Carry answered "Nothing," and proceeded on her way more sullenly than ever. Verging towards home, it seemed as though the shadow of it fell upon the daughter, and submerged her, bringing darker and intenser thoughts. The fair face became more stern in its expression, and the white forehead was furrowed by more lines than one. It might have been the thoughts of the home to which she was approaching, or of that which had encountered her upon her way—the facts are not evident enough yet for us to arrive at fair conclusions.

A turning out of the London Road, a maze of streets that led in all directions—to the Borough Road, to the Newington Causeway, to streets, and courts, and alleys, all resonant with noise that summer night, and alive with men, women, and children. Into a somewhat broader thoroughfare, cutting this network of streets in two, and standing before a house, having on its right two large dilapidated gates, on which was painted the name of "Webber, Carriage Breaker." No need to indicate the profession of this Webber,

for the signs of it were opposite the house, and some distance down the street, and along the entire length of the blank wall which shut in the major portion of Mr. Webber's premises.

The goods that Mr. Webber dealt in had over-run his space, and there were two old carriages chained together by the wheels, in convict fashion, before his very door, waiting their turn for breaking up. They had had their day, and seen the fashions out, tired their owners' fancy, and passed from hand to hand, from stage to stage, like a simile of ruin. Perhaps, with these types of family distress continually before them, the Webbers—*pere et mere*—had become careful of their money, and shy of "company." There were many tales of improvidence, and debt, and bankruptcy, of selling off by order of the creditors, amongst the carriage wrecks in which Mr. Webber dealt.

There had been a front garden to Mr. Webber's house once, but it was a ghastly forecourt now, full of springs, splinter-bars, panels, and wheels, the latter always chained together, as though their present owner stood in fear of their making off some night at a headlong pace, in search of their better days.

Along this forecourt proceeded Mrs. Webber and daughter; at the door, on which was a small brass plate with "Webber, Carriage Breaker," once more notified, Mrs. Webber delivered her three solemn dabs again. After waiting some time and with great patience, the door was opened or slammed back—it was doubtful which—and the back of the gentleman who had responded to the knock was seen receding uncourteously towards the parlour. Mrs. Webber entered, followed by her daughter, who looked wildly down the street, and made a still wilder signal with her hand before she closed the door—a signal that was seen by some one in the rear, and rapidly returned.

After the door was closed, this some one took up his position against a public-house at a little distance, on the opposite side of the way, and seemed to make up his mind to wait. A short, thin man, indifferently attired, with one elbow protruding from a coat three sizes too large for him, and with a cap pulled over his forehead till it met his eyebrows, and the broken peak shadowed his nose. A man with not much face to be seen until he jerked his head back now and then, to take stock of passers-by, preferring that method of observance to raising

his cap one inch higher on his head. A thin-faced man, with scrubby whiskers, and still scrubbier moustache, holding between his lips a short clay pipe, which he smoked vigorously whilst waiting there, his hands in his trousers pockets, and his legs encroaching on the public space. A figure that one sees, not too seldom, at the same place—a fitting figure for a gin-shop portal, evidence of what has been and what is—the man-wreck that the fiery waters have washed ashore, fit for nothing good or profitable.

He was evidently at his ease, with his back to the “Feathers.” He could have waited there comfortably all night, varying proceedings now and then by refilling his pipe, and having dram-glasses brought him. That was life and enjoyment enough for anybody !

But dram-glasses were not brought, and he did not go in search of them, for reasons pecuniary and cogent ; so he kept his place sober and profound, clinging to the varnished marble pillar, a gin parasite. Occasionally people stumbled over his feet, and he begged pardon in a husky voice, and without altering his incline towards the roadway ; once a little bonnetless girl tripped over

his boots and fell, and he stooped and picked her up with a gentleness that might not have been expected in him, and told her not to cry, but to make haste home, and go to bed like a good girl as she was. Every five or ten minutes he jerked up his head to look more intently at the carriage-breaker's windows, and then, satisfied with the inspection, to subside again into himself.

A patient vigil, which was not disturbed for hours by anything important. Servant-maids came for supper beer; men and women passed in and out, talking loudly, laughing loudly, swearing loudly, according to their different degrees of drink; the potman started on his round, and came back again in due course, and still the watcher smoking on in placid disregard of time and place. Lights were burning in two of the carriage-breaker's windows, and they were facts to him which kept him stationary. Finally, the potman appearing again, and thrusting up the shutters with his pole; the last man turned out of the gin-shop, and the doors barred and bolted on the thirsting—but still the man with the short pipe biding his time.

The lights extinguished in Mr. Webber's house, the street becoming more deserted—a church clock

striking twelve, when the man moved at last, shook himself in a dog-like fashion, and crossed the road. At the same instant the creaking gates leading into the yard were unfastened from within, and left ajar. The man, used as it were to these manœuvres, passed them, turned back hastily, and stepped through; the gates were locked once more behind him, and he was standing in the night's darkness—very intense and thick beneath the gateway—peering beyond at the lighter yard, where seemed heaped all the old carriage-material of the world.

"Joe," said a voice at his side.

"Carry, old girl," was his answer—"why, it's blacker than ever underneath this place."

"Hush!—don't talk so loud—father's always a light sleeper. Where have you been lately?"

"In the country—about the fairs."

"Doing well?"

"About as well as usual, Carry," replied Joe, with a short ironical laugh.

"I have made you up a bundle of things, which you can wear or sell, or do what you like with; money, you know, I haven't much of."

"I suppose not."

"Here's five shillings—I wish it were five

pounds, Joe, although it would not do more good than the five shillings—would it, now?”

Joe laughed again.

“Five pounds would go further, at any rate. Where’s the bundle, Carry?”

“In the corner behind you.”

“I shall be locked up for one of these bundles some day—the police are always suspicious of bundles after dark, and upon my soul it will be hard to explain their possession.”

“It must all come out then—there’s nothing of which I shall be ashamed. You are my brother, and you were the only one ever kind to me in *there*.”

The brother could understand her gesture, although the darkness was too impenetrable to note it.

“Oh! you were a child,” he said, groping about for his bundle, “and that made all the difference.”

“You—you don’t ask me how *I* am—whether I am happy, Joe?” she said.

“You are a woman, and can take things patiently. They mean well, I daresay—you would be a young fool not to put up with them.”

“You couldn’t.”

"Well, I went wrong, Carry, and that was my fault. They might have gone the wrong way to work to cure me—it's as likely as not, and it doesn't matter now!"

"They're not like anybody else's father and mother, Joe. They keep you down, and hold you down, and think that you can't be right in anything."

"Ah! they've notions of their own," said Joe, very indifferently; "but a woman can put up with them—she would be a flat if she didn't. And, talking about women, are there any women's dresses in this bundle?"

"One or two of mine; I thought you might sell them for something."

"That's a good girl. But I shan't sell them, although they'll be rather short for Mrs. Webber."

"*Mrs. Who?*"

"Oh! you didn't know that I was married?"

"How should I know?"

"Of course not. Oh! I've been married these six months; she's—she's a giantess."

"A giantess!"

"A little investment of mine—I married on spec, and she's not a bad sort, though it was a bad

spec, mind you. But you won't care to hear anything about my affairs, and perhaps the governor will drop upon us here. Good-bye."

"I wish I could marry and get away from here—marry a giant even, to be quit of this dull, dreadful life!"

"Take it easy, Carry," said her brother, swinging his bundle on his shoulder; "I can see now what a fool I was not to take it easy! You're a woman, and can manage them both—I would, if I were you. Always take it easy, girl."

"Wait a moment," said Carry, "you must do me a favour in return—I've always helped you."

"You always were a trump to stick up for a fellow, I will say that."

"You must take this letter to-night—to-night, you understand—to the address on the envelope."

"But—"

"It's Shad Thames way, but I have only you to trust in, Joe, and I can't go myself. There's a letter-box in the gate—drop the letter down—it isn't much to do"

"I'll do it, Carry,"

"Here, then—now, good night."

She gave him the letter, unlocked the gate, and let him out into the street, securing the gates behind him. He went away at a good pace, bundle on shoulder, keeping in the shadow of the houses, and always increasing his rate of progression past a lamp-post. He was afraid of his honestly-acquired bundle, and of questions concerning it, for a policeman in the distance scared him, and he went back a few paces, and down a street that he had recently passed. Finally he found his way to a narrow, stifling court, into which he plunged, as into a Slough of Despond, and worked his way to a house at the extremity, wedged against another house that met it at right angles, and terminated that geometrical thoroughfare.

A knock at the door, and then heavy feet shambling along the passage and shaking the house as they advanced.

"Is that you, Joe?" was called through the key-hole.

"Why, what have you to be nervous about?" he called back at her; "you're not afraid of being robbed, Sall?"

"Not much," was the answer returned; and then

the door opened, and Joe Webber trundled his bundle into the passage.

"See what's to be made of those things, Sally, by the time I get back again," he said to the dim figure in the unlighted passage; "the girl's been good to me again—she's something like a sister!"

"P'raps all'll come round in time, and——"

"And don't distress yourself—for that's not likely. Ah! if you only knew my governor!"

"Where are you going?"

"To deliver a message for Carry. One good turn deserves another. Shan't be long."

"Joe—Joe!" his wife called after him in a deep tone.

"Hollo!"

"Don't get drinking to-night, for God's sake, if she has given you any money."

"Why, the public-houses are shut, you stupid!"

"So much the better!"

Joe hurried away, and in a few minutes he was out of the court and in Blackman Street, Borough.

Under the first lamp-post—which he did not shrink from now—he stopped to read the address of the letter that had been given him by Carry.

"What's she up to in Shad Thames," he said,

reflectively ; “sweethearting, I suppose—to think that that girl has grown old enough for those games, now !”

He held the letter towards the light, and read the address slowly to himself.

“Walter Tressider Esq., Honesty Wharf, Shad Thames.”

“Well, I’m blest !” was the inelegant comment of Joseph Webber, before starting on his way again.

CHAPTER V.

NEAL GALBRAITH BEGINS BUSINESS.

NEAL GALBRAITH was ready for business the following day—eager for that stir and hum of business-life, which would assure him of his place in the world, and his worth therein. Presently he should be earning his living, he thought proudly, keeping the wolf from the door of the Galbraiths—working upwards, perhaps, as so many had done before him.

It was not for the Galbraiths to be ever at the bottom of the ladder, watching people less clever than they, making their way to the top. If he had not his father's ability, thought Neal, he had his father's perseverance and doggedness, and they would take him upwards, unless he gave way like his father. 'He was young, strong and firm—and *that* was not likely!

Mr. Galbraith, senior, surprised his son by appearing at breakfast at eight o'clock.

"Early hours, sir," said Neal; "why, however will you get through the day without me?"

"I shall manage, my lad," replied the father, rubbing his hands together with supreme satisfaction at his son's astonishment; "I'm not going to lie a-bed any more, and put everybody out, and give everybody trouble; I hope to be of use presently—don't you think I'm coming round, Neal?"

"Certainly—only you must not go too fast, remember."

"I shall be very careful, and you, Neal, always careful, too?"

"Trust that," Neal answered confidently.

"I thought I'd come down and give you a bit of advice before you started. Beginning the world this is, Neal!"

"With a stout heart, and hope ahead of me!"

"Yes. Now, Neal, lad, pay a little attention to me, and don't fidget with that spoon. It is good advice—upon my word, it is."

Neal laid down his spoon, and looked attentively at the little gentleman opposite, who sat with his heels on the rail of the chair, his withered

hands clasped together, his whole form bent forwards eagerly. He had come down in one of his bright moods—moods which even surprised his son occasionally—and it was an intelligent, if worn, face into which Neal gazed. Mr. Galbraith had brushed his scanty gray hairs to the back of his head, after his son's fashion, and appeared to have a bigger forehead than ever in consequence.

"You're going into a new world—treat it with respect, Neal, and don't hope to be respected yourself till you have done something to deserve it."

The old man spoke so clearly and precisely, that Neal's interest deepened. Yes, his father was getting better—since his illness, he had never heard him speak like that before.

"For you see, Neal, strangers will take time to understand you, and find out how clever you are."

"Ha! ha!—how clever! That they will, I'll wager!"

"You have odd ways, and if everybody don't take to them, why, don't fall out about *that*. Go on quietly, patiently but firmly, thinking of your employer's interest before your own, in office hours, and how to advance your own, honestly and fairly, out of them."

"Yes, sir."

"You'll try and remember?"

"I call them golden words, sir," said Neal, in an excited manner; "golden words of promise to me!"

Words of promise for his father's better life, he thought, he hoped. He went downstairs in the same excited way, and took Mrs. Higgs by the wrist into the parlour.

"Good Lor! boy, how hard you grips!" cried Mrs. Higgs, writhing in his grasp.

"I beg pardon—I wasn't aware that I held you so tightly," he said; "but, Mrs. Higgs—see to *him*!—find something to amuse him, in the house, or in that back garden—I rely upon your help. He's getting better—oh! you should have heard him talk to me, like his dear wise self of the old days, madam!"

"He'll brighten up, 'pend upon that, Master Neal. You'll 'cuse my calling you Master Neal, sometimes?"

"Always, Mrs. Higgs—it's an old name, that speaks of the old times."

"The old times coming back, sir."

"Ay! we'll hope so now! Good morning—if

you should find him drifting into talk about machinery, stop him ; if he ask for a paper and pencil, tell him—oh ! tell him, they don't sell such things in London ! Good morning."

He was on the door step, when he turned again.

"I may as well tell you that the name of my employer is Hopeful—it may be necessary."

"That's a lucky name, sir."

"It sounds like it. Good day."

Neal Galbraith went away to business. Tall for his age, manly for his age, he did not deserve the epithet that Mrs. Higgs had bestowed upon him that morning. He looked, as Mrs. Higgs said to herself again on the door step, "Quite the man !"

"He's quite the man," she repeated, watching him ; "and all the better as things have turned out ; though I don't like young ones to get men and women early. And there's that imperent dressmaker—the youngest—looking after him behind the blind—I know the hussey ; and if Miss Beswig hasn't come to the door to see if it rains !—that boy'll be worried by the gals about here, if I don't take care !"

Meanwhile the boy aforesaid went on his way, his face gradually assuming that stern look which

beset it when he was "left to himself." Alone in the world, with the world before him, he seemed to become impressed with the seriousness of his position, or the weight of his responsibility, and to grow old with it as it took possession of his mind. Life was an uncertainty with him yet, he must not become too sanguine, and believe too readily in his own advancement, or his father's better health. The present was dark enough—and in the present he must live.

Neal went on at a soldier-like pace up the St. George's Road, and down the Borough, marching with head flung back, and chest squared, like a man afraid of nothing. Walking rapidly and regularly with the stream of clerks bound Citywards, his resolute face attracted some little attention; people coming against stream occasionally bestowed upon him that half-curious, half-vacant gaze, common to passers-by interested in human nature.

Neal became embarrassed by these London starers, at last, and fancied that he must have a "black" on his nose, till a young lady, with rainbow trimmings, going on milliner's duty in the

Causeway, smiled like a sister as she passed—and young ladies never smile at “blacks!”

At Tooley Street, Neal Galbraith paused, made some inquiries of a policeman, and then went on again, turning suddenly to the right, and leaving the bank and merchant clerks to flow on over London Bridge. Keeping to the Southwark side, this youth who had told his father of his berth in the City, went through Tooley Street into riverside streets, Shad Thames way; past potatoe salesmen's depôts, six-storied wharves, where casks were flying in mid-air, and carts and waggons were blocking up the thoroughfare; where, through open gates, glimpses were caught of the river, and of innumerable masts of ships; where three-fourths of human kind seemed clad in corduroy jackets, and white, smeary blouses, and only a few out-of-the-way people, like himself, wore broad-cloth. Neal plunged on, looking right and left, and, failing in his search, finally taking refuge in advice of a porter out of place, who was leaning against a post, and waiting to be taken on as “extra.”

“In the metal trade?—don't know sich name, sir,” was the response to Neal's inquiry.

"It's a large firm, I believe."

"I'm fresh to these parts. Here, Jim!"

Jim appeared, to tender information—Jim, at the end of a truck, laden with a woolly produce.

"What name, sir?"

"Tressider."

"I think there is a little crib higher up of that name; but I never did any business for 'em, and I don't know anybody else who did."

"That can't be the place—they're in a very large way of business. It's a wealthy firm."

"Ah! you've got the wrong name, then."

Neal did not stay to argue with this stubborn man. Got the wrong name, indeed! Why, that name was engraven on his heart, as Calais was on Bloody Mary's! Not a wealthy firm?—and it had spent thirty thousand pounds in law, he knew. Neal went on, however, and presently gave up again.

"Which is Tressider's—people in the metal trade?" he asked again, somewhat fiercely this time, for it was close on nine o'clock, and he would not have been late the first day for the world.

The person addressed was a shock-headed youth, with trousers tucked up to his knees, and bare

legs and feet plastered with river mud. He had been evidently enjoying himself at the water-side.

"Tressider's?—oh! you've passed it."

"Confound it!"

"Seven doors orf—little place—gates in the wall, and a brass plate—give us a hapenny, guv'ner."

Our hero paid his halfpenny for information, and found the firm of Tressider at last. There were two small gates, ornamented with a brass plate, and a letter-box. One gate was ajar, and our hero stepped through into a paved yard, on the left of which was a warehouse,—not so small in itself, as it was dwarfed by the buildings towering above it,—and on the right a private dwelling-house, with a lamp over the entrance-door, and the door open. Neal went up the steps, and through a swing glass-door into a melancholy office, where a lanky youth, lost in a high shirt-collar, was practising with dumb-bells. He put the dumb-bells down as Neal advanced, and surveyed him between half-closed eye-lids.

"Is Mr. Tressider within?"

"Which one?"

"There are two, then?"

"There's the principal—he's not up yet. There's the principal's nephew—he's not down yet."

"What do you mean?"

The flippant youth backed two steps at this stern inquiry. Neal might intend mischief, and it was as well to be out of harm's way, and arm's reach.

"I can't explain anything further," he said impudently; "Mr. Tressider, junior, will be down here in about half an hour—when Mr. Tressider, senior, gets up, I daresay he'll attend to you, if you've anything to pay."

"Take my card to your master, and tell him that I have come, as requested."

"Won't you wait till Mr. Pike comes?—he knows all about the business—he knows everything, he'll be here in a minute."

"Take that card upstairs at once," said Neal.

The voice and look were sufficient this time, and the youth departed, leaving his dumb-bells on the desk.

Neal looked round at the gloomy office, made noisy only by a viciously ticking clock, and wondered where the business was to come from, or how

the business that strayed hitherwards was generally conducted. People must pass the place, as he had, and grow tired of searching for it—it must all be in the “connection,” he thought, and here were only accounts to keep and ledgers to fill. But there were no ledgers in sight, no books, pens, ink, on the three or four desks before him—nothing about except dust, which was almost an inch thick on everything.

Neal was standing with his back to an office stool wondering still, when a high-shouldered young man of five or six-and-twenty, came slowly up the steps, as though he were counting them, entered the office, took off his hat and a pair of black crinkly gloves, set them on one side, passed behind a long low counter, to the first desk near the door, mounted his office stool, and then turned upon our hero a pair of fishy grey eyes.

“Can I do anything for you, sir?” he asked in a weak voice.

“Nothing, thank you, at present. I have sent up my name to Mr. Tressider.”

“Oh! indeed.”

This was evidently Mr. Pike, thought Neal, the

gentleman who knew all about the business. Mr. Pike was a strange specimen of a clerk—and of a head clerk. No bustle about him, quiet and methodical, evidently taking the events of business life with great composure. A man somewhat above the middle height, narrow-chested and high-shouldered—a pale-faced, nubbly-looking man, with high cheek bones, and bristling sandy hair cut short all over his head in tooth-brush pattern. A man with a melancholy face, that one wondered if it ever smiled—a somewhat shabbily-dressed man, who did not study appearances, or care about a fit to his coat in office hours, at least.

Mr. Pike opened his desk, and drew forth his books from an inner receptacle, held an inkstand to the light to make quite sure that there was sufficient liquid therein for the purposes required, dipped a pen into the ink, and then stared hard at Neal again.

“Your name is Galbraith, I think?” he said at last.

“Yes, sir.”

“Have you been waiting long, sir?”

“About five minutes.”

“This will be your desk,” indicating the third

from the door; "I hope you are clever at correspondence?"

"I can write a letter pretty well."

"And a good hand at figures?"

"Try me."

"I will presently," said Mr. Pike; "there's no occasion for hurry. We're not very busy just now."

"I hope I'm not one clerk too many, sir?" suggested Neal, drily.

Mr. Pike turned on him again his unexpressive sole's eyes.

"You'll be of use now, Mr. Walter is—is not particularly regular. We can't get on without two here—Radwick's nothing to speak of, and insults everybody he can. Poor fellow, it's his infirmity!"

He wrote a few lines, then left off again.

"May I ask how old you are?"

"Going on for twenty, sir."

"I should have thought that you had been older than that," he said dreamily; "you are the son of Galbraith, the inventor?"

Neal started at this pertinent question.

"Yes; did Mr. Tressider tell you that?"

"No, I guessed it. The name's not common, and your father *was* an inventor, and a very clever one. He is well, I hope?"

"Very well, thank you," replied Neal, who was not a young man to parade his family troubles.

Mr. Pike scratched away for awhile, then left off again.

"Business is rather slack just now," he added, as if by way of apology for his lax attention to it; "nothing much doing in metal. We expect a very large order next month from Russia."

"Oh! indeed!"

"Your father did not break up much, I suppose, when the—the money was all gone?"

"Sir!"

"You will excuse me, but it's a singular fact, that some people do."

"Wouldn't you break up, sir, a little, under similar circumstances?"

"No."

Mr. Pike said this very quietly, but with a singular firmness that interested Neal.

"I don't believe any man can lose his fortune without grieving after it."

"Not any man whose soul is linked to the world

from which he extracted it—perhaps not. For he seeks his comfort from the world, and it fails him.”

Neal stared at the speaker.

“My father lost a fortune, but he did not give way,” continued Mr. Pike. “He was a happy man to the end of his days.”

“And you?—how did you feel when they said that you were no longer a gentleman, but must earn your own living?”

“Oh! I felt pretty well, thank you. I was young and strong, and I went to work with a will.”

“So will I—when there’s any work to do,” added Neal, ruefully.

Mr. Pike dashed into business again, muttering,

“We expect to be very busy next month.”

Somewhat perplexed, and even oppressed by Mr. Pike, our hero went to the third desk, which his fellow-clerk had indicated, and mounted his office stool to ruminate.

“I’ll put you in the way, in a minute,” Mr. Pike said; and Neal thought that it was almost time he did, if his employers wished to make anything out of his services. Mr. Pike finished his letter, and

sealed it, then left his desk, and came to our hero with a heavily-laden bill-file.

“ You can see what all these amount to, in the first place, and then I’ll put you in the way of our system of book-keeping—it’s rather complicated, but it’s a perfect check on expenditure, and my own invention.”

Neal began adding up the bills that had been given him ; and whilst doing so, the messenger, Mr. Radwick of abrupt demeanour, returned to the office, cleared his dumb-bells from the desk, and set to work himself. Neal thought that he might have brought him an invitation to see Mr. Tressider ; but the junior clerk made no sign, and Neal would not appear anxious to face his employer.

Business began about ten o’clock—one small boy arrived with a letter, which required an immediate answer from Mr. Tressider, and did not get it ; two men drove into the paved yard with a cart, and Radwick went out and spoke to them, found a warehouseman from somewhere, delivered to them a large kitchen range, took their money for it, and gave Mr. Pike’s receipt for the same ; a gentleman entered with a pattern-book,

and talked volubly to Mr. Pike, who shook his head, and said they did not care about any new designs at present, and that they had their own designers down in Birmingham; two gentlemen called to see Mr. Tressider, and promised to call again in an hour; somebody came and paid money to Mr. Pike; another gentleman, with a pen behind his ear, looked in about the gas-rate; finally, a young man, with a flower in his button-hole, and a jewel in the riding-whip, that he was slinging backwards and forwards in his hand, came with a bound into the counting-house.

"Is Mr. Walter down yet?"

"I haven't seen him," said Mr. Pike.

"I know his room!—I'll look him up!—oh! here he is."

"Ah! Jennings, old fellow!—anything wrong?"

"Yes, by George! there just is."

Neal glanced at the last comer, advancing from the door at the end of the office—a tall young man, of one-and-twenty, or thereabouts, with a fresh-coloured, handsome face, and a long silky moustache, that almost touched his shoulders.

He looked at Neal as he passed, and then the two young men went to the door step and talked

long and earnestly, the gentleman called Jennings softening by degrees beneath the pleasant demeanour of his friend.

"But he's thrown up his part like a fool," said Jennings; "and we're so pressed for time, and it will put the lot of us out. I said all along that we should make a mess of it."

"Leave it to me—we'll fight through it, old boy, and bring down the house with the applause of assembled multitudes. It's deuced odd if I can't find a substitute—when's the last rehearsal?"

"To-morrow night, of course."

"Trust in Walter Tressider—I'll work it."

The two stood talking together for some time, then shook hands, and parted; Walter Tressider returning to the office, and advancing to our hero.

"Mr. Galbraith, I presume?"

Neal bowed.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Galbraith," he said, shaking hands with our hero. "I trust that we shall not kill you with over-work?"

"I am not afraid of that, sir."

"Will you step into the first room on the left,

and see my uncle. I quite forgot to mention that he wishes to speak to you for a few moments; but I've been so bothered with business lately, that I think my memory's becoming defective. Radwick, call me a cab."

"Yes, sir."

"Any letters for me?"

"One posted by hand, sir—it's on your desk."

"All right. Hansom cab mind, Radwick. The first room on the left, Mr. Galbraith."

CHAPTER VI.

MR. TRESSIDER.

NEAL GALBRAITH did not leave his desk and make his way to the first room on the left without an acceleration of his heart-beats. He was about to face the man to whom might be attributed his father's ruin; and although Neal had long since mapped out his future conduct, and looked at ruin philosophically, yet his blood stirred somewhat more rapidly as he went along the passage towards the room that had been indicated.

He touched lightly on the panel of the door.

"Come in!" was responded from the distance; and Neal Galbraith entering, faced his father's foe.

Mr. Tressider was seated at his breakfast-table, enjoying his morning meal, his morning paper,

and his luxury of ease. He looked up as Neal advanced, and disclosed a clear, sharply-cut face, thin and lined, and rendered somewhat fierce by two bushy grey eyebrows, surmounting two glittering grey eyes. A man of sixty years, or less perhaps, with an air of intelligence, even refinement, in his face; a tall man, with a cap of Turkish material on his head, to match the dressing-gown in which he was enwrapped; lastly, a very thin man, who had given way in the chest, or the back, or both, and bent forwards in his chair.

Neal walked at once towards Mr. Tressider, shrank for an instant at the thin white hand extended to him, then took it, and held it for an instant in his own.

"So we bury the hatchet, and smoke the pipe of peace, young sir? But perhaps you do not smoke?"

"Not at present."

, "Will you sit down for a few moments? I have a little to say to you."

Neal complied, and faced his master. The black eyes of the youth did not falter beneath the steady, intent gaze of the principal, but looked boldly and fearlessly back at him.

"You are like your letter," Mr. Tressider said at last.

"I do not understand you, sir."

"Frank, fierce, and determined, I mean. You send me an extraordinary epistle, acknowledging that you bear me no good will, and accusing me of your father's downfall. You speak of the father's ill health, as though I could have helped him going to law, and trying to impair my digestion by his writs of injunction ; you compliment me, somewhat bitterly, it is true, on my victory—such as it was—and you ask me to make atonement by placing you in a way to get your own living, and assist your father, who has become a sufferer by his obstinacy."

"He was in the right, sir."

"I may dispute that fact—wrong or right, the case is ended ; and the lawyers are enjoying another oyster, and have found a new Galbraith and Tressider to partake of the shells. You don't want to argue the point with *me*?"

"No, sir."

"You are content with the result?"

"I am resigned to it, sir."

"Resignation is half-brother to contentment—

so much the better. You are not fond of novels or theatres, I hope?"

"I have not time for either, sir."

"But are you fond of them?"

"Well—no."

"Then your head is not likely to be turned by a fine scheme for retributive justice? You are not the family avenger, waiting to pay me out for old scores, as the avengers do in books and plays?"

"No, sir."

"No hidden motive in coming hither?"

"My motive was explained fairly in the letter."

"I believe it—more, I am sorry for your father's trouble, although I never let other peoples' troubles disturb me. It's a horrible plan, and wears one out like wildfire. You said in your sharp, acrid missive—upon my honour, I like that letter very much!—that it was my duty to give you a chance of a clerkship in London. For the sake of argument, I will say that it *was* my duty—here you are, what do you think of your place?"

"I shall like it, if there's plenty to do."

"Oh! you want plenty to do, to get the superfluous energy out of your system? We shall be

busy presently—we take things by jumps here. We have a foundry at Birmingham, and when that's in full swing we work away busily in this place. At present we're just a trifle slack."

One corner of Mr. Tressider's mouth twitched spasmodically, and he hastened to disguise that weakness by his large breakfast-cup. Then he looked at Neal again.

"You are a bad temper, I should think?" he said.

"I used to be a little hasty—I have learned to break myself of that habit," answered Neal.

"You are a man, I should think, too, who would work his way in the world in good time. I suppose you resolved to come to London and make your fortune?"

"To come to London, at all events."

"Supposing that I had refused your request—thought no more of your cool suggestion?"

"I should have come to London all the same."

"Exactly. I can see firmness, or pigheadedness, expressed in your countenance. That will do for the present, Mr. Galbraith; you can return to your desk. Mr. Pike will instruct you in your duties. You will like Mr. Pike very much, or

detest him very much, according to the impression he makes upon you. He's an odd fish!"

Neal was hesitating whether to withdraw or not, when Mr. Tressider said :

"What is it?"

"Sir?" said Neal, interrogatively.

"You have something more to say—speak out, and then we shall start fairly."

"The fact is, sir, my father is ignorant that I am in your service—he will probably for ever remain ignorant that I have stooped so low as to ask a favour, or claim a right, at your hands," said Neal. "His mind is very weak, and, God help him, it is very easy to deceive him! I tell you this in case of accidents, in order that you may not be surprised at my friends' ignorance of my mode of living."

"Why, what shall I ever know of your friends?"

Neal coloured.

"Probably nothing, but strange things occur in life."

"Ah! more things than are dreamed of in our philosophy—exactly. I'll keep your secret. May I ask one question?"

"Yes, sir."

"Has your father a very great horror of me?"

"Your name is coupled with his ruin—you hurled him from independence to indigence. Oh! sir, he was so noble and clever a man, until you broke down his mind as well as his bank!"

Mr. Tressider sat with his hands clasped upon his knee. At the last words of our hero those hands knit together more closely, though the face betrayed no emotion, and seemed impervious to impression.

"Your father, like yourself, was inclined to be firm," he said, after a pause. "I offered compensation at the outset—I offered to buy his patent at half the sum he wished—I did my best to arrange things amicably."

"Sir, you might have bought his patent at his own price, or given it up altogether. You had no right to use it, and not pay him for it. It was a rob——"

Neal paused in this strong assertion. He had forgotten his place, and he had promised himself that he would always remember *that*.

"Robbery!" added Mr. Tressider; "well, call it a robbery, if you like. It takes a sharper lance than yours to pierce the hide of a rhinoceros."

But I was not alone in the robbery—other men had adopted your father's principle, English as well as foreign, and I could not be left in the background for the sake of an idea, and chased clean out of the trade. Your father was unfortunate enough to pitch upon me for an example, and I fought my battle with him to the last!"

"Not to the last, sir; had we carried it on to the last, we should have been victorious. Every step was a dear victory on our side—but it was a victory still."

"And ended in collapse—a strange result of victory sometimes."

"You had the longer purse, sir, and—we fell!"

"It was a game of Beggar my Neighbour, and I won by the odd card. And by all that's holy in commerce, I have never seen much to rejoice at. Well, we sink the bygones, Mr. Galbraith, and begin afresh."

"Yes, sir—if I can."

"You bear no malice and hatred in your heart, as the Catechism says?"

"No, sir."

"Presently you will love me, your neighbour, like yourself—eh?"

"No, sir—I think not."

"You will make use of me as a stepping-stone, and when a better place offers itself, and just as you are becoming useful to me, you will take it?"

"Yes, sir. I must advance in life—I must get on."

"Then take my advice, and don't be so fond of the sound of your own voice. Next to the Great Plague, is the Great Pest of Prattle."

"You will not find me *prattle* much, sir," said Neal stiffly ; "I have been led into conversation, not thrust my conversation upon you."

"Oh ! I don't regret this charming interview in the least—I have been curious to see a Galbraith, delighted with the piquancy of our position towards each other. Where does your father live ?"

"Pardon me, but that is at present a secret."

"Very well. Get back to business now, and try and deserve your salary. You asked for a fair trial—if after trial you are found wanting, it is more than likely that you will be found missing too."

"I only ask for a *fair* trial, sir."

"You shall have it. Shut the door after you, please—I am subject to rheumatics."

When Neal had complied with his request, Mr. Tressider sat with his hands clasped upon his knee in the old position, very statuesque and thoughtful. After awhile he rose and shook himself, as though to shake from his mind the thoughts which had weighed upon him.

"I almost wish he had not come," muttered the principal.

CHAPTER VII.

FELLOW-CLERKS.

NEAL GALBRAITH was not long in mastering the intricacies of the Books—the new system invented expressly for that establishment by David Pike, Esq., senior clerk. The books were small, the system after all was not intricate, the items were sparsely scattered through the pages, the dates of business transactions few and far between. Neal was perplexed more by the want of business, by the absence of that noise and bustle inseparable from business, than by the demand upon his energies.

He could not understand the stagnant character of Mr. Tressider's trade. Had Mr. Tressider met with retributive justice from other hands than his, and "gone to the wall" with better and higher principled men?—was the shadow of trouble hang-

ing over the place, or was it peculiar to all businesses, Shad Thames way? Neal was new to London, and to wholesale trades; he should understand them both presently, and with them, Mr. Tressider's way of managing affairs.

The whole place bore the air of getting on badly, Neal was convinced—few people came in and out of the warehouse across the yard; David Pike appeared to have little to do at the desk, but that might have been pretence, for what Neal knew to the contrary; the messenger, Radwick, asked for half a day's leave, and got it; Mr. Walter Tressider did not come back till three in the afternoon, and then he walked up and down the office with a play-book in his hand.

"Nothing new, I suppose, Pike?" he asked once, as he passed the senior clerk's desk.

"No, sir."

"Governor at home still?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Walter Tressider shut up his book, and came to Neal's desk once more.

"You're the son of that gentleman with whom my uncle had such a plaguey long law-suit, I suppose?"

"The same, sir."

"I thought so, although my uncle did not enlighten me. He never enlightens me about anything, for the matter of that—" he added, a little aggrieved; "but still it was easy to make a good guess in this instance. But what made you begin life here?"

"Your uncle got the better of my father—and I thought he might take pity on the vanquished."

"Take pity—that's a good joke!" said Tresider, laughing; "I never knew him pity anything or anybody. He's as hard as nails, sir!"

"I should imagine so."

"But that does not matter to you, who haven't the misfortune to live with him—you'll get your money and be free after six. By George! how I am grumbling—that's my weakness, perhaps. You are not fond of theatricals—are you?"

Neal wondered at this question for the second time that day.

"Not very."

"No decided objection, like—old Pike?" dropping his voice a little.

"No—why do you ask?"

"Oh! for no particular reason—" and Mr. Tressider, after a few more commonplaces, left the counting-house for the day.

Neal went home about five, Mr. Pike accompanying him as far as London Bridge, saying very little in the way of conversation, and behaving somewhat clumsily in the street, as though something on his mind rendered him inattentive to outward circumstances.

At the foot of London Bridge, he reached forth his hand and said,

"Good night."

"Good night, sir."

"You are a young man beginning life," he said suddenly, and in a very embarrassed way; "would you—would you mind just reading *this*?"

He dived into his pocket, and produced a dingy paper, of a suspicious tract-like appearance.

"I'll read it, to oblige you. What is it?—a tract?"

"Yes. It can't do any harm to read it, you know."

"No, not much," said Neal, doubtfully; "but why do you think I stand in need of a tract, sir?"

"We all stand in need of good advice, Mr. Galbraith. One can't be too careful in these times about our simplest steps in life."

"N—no."

"You're very young, and young men are easily influenced—I was myself at your age, almost laughed into doing wrong. Very dreadful, wasn't it?"

"Very."

"And if you've a father to support, you damage him as well as yourself, by any indiscretion."

"You fancy I'm very weak-minded, Mr. Pike."

"No, I don't—I fancy you are—don't be offended—a little self-sufficient, and that's a weakness."

"Yes," said Neal, colouring; "I suppose it is."

"I'm the head clerk at Tressider's, and you must put up with a little patronage and advice, Mr. Galbraith," he said gently; "I always give the best advice in my power to those with whom I am likely to be friends."

"And how is the advice received, sir?" asked Neal, a little saucily.

"Very badly indeed, as a rule. But my ill-

success don't daunt me—I'm never daunted—I keep on advising, whenever I have a chance. Good night, again!"

"Good night, sir."

Neal resumed his homeward route, puzzled to account for Mr. Pike's ready interest in him, as he had been puzzled in other matters more than once that day. He looked at the title of the tract he still carried in his hand, and read:—" *On the Dangers of Worldly Acquaintances.*"

"This Pike's a humbug," muttered Neal, striding along; "but I'll keep my word, and read his tract. I wonder if it's his own composition, and with whom he is afraid that I shall become acquainted? Young Radwick, whose head I shall have to punch before he suits my ideas of civility, or young Tressider, my employer's relative, and a cut above the Galbraiths. A pleasant face, that one might take to for a friend, if friendships were not too expensive a luxury for me to cultivate. Hollo!"

Neal Galbraith might well give vent to this last expletive, for in the heart of the Borough he came face to face with his father, advancing rather feebly towards him, with a disturbed expression of countenance.

"You must not do this, sir—upon my word, father, this won't do at any price."

"Ah! is that Neal?—I am so glad that I have found you—I was coming a little way to meet you."

"Don't try it again, or you'll get lost. Mrs. Higgs ought to have known better than this," he added.

"She's preparing the tea, and don't know that I have started, Neal," said Mr. Galbraith. "I—I was afraid that you might lose yourself in these streets, and never find your way back to me."

"Trust me, sir, for that."

"I was coming right, you see."

"Yes, but don't do this again, or I shall be very angry," said Neal.

The father hung his head at the son's reproof, as the son had hung his in the old days, when the strength of mind was on the other side.

"I thought it would please you, Neal."

"No—it can't."

"Then I'll keep at home until I get stronger, boy. Every day I feel less muddled—oh! much less! And if I become hale and strong again—what a rare time for you and me!"

"We shall both be grateful, I'm sure."

Neal drew his father's arm within his own, and took him homewards very carefully. In his kindness for his father there was an intense earnestness that was touching. When he had brought his father to their Fife Street lodgings, and he was alone with Mrs. Higgs in the parlour, he started that well-meaning old lady by his fiercer face.

"I asked you to take care of my father, not to let him wander about the streets, and come to harm—and you promised. Will you keep your word or not?"

"To be sure I will, all I can, sir," said Mrs. Higgs meekly—"it's not mentioned in the account, but I'll do it, for the sake of the 'spect I have always borne him. Please don't look like that—you mind me so uncommon of my brother-in-law at his worst."

Neal was pacified by the remonstrance—even ashamed of his own sternness.

"I don't know why I should be angry with you either—my father's vagaries are not your business; you are not paid to wait upon them, and I cannot afford an attendant, even if I thought he wanted one. You mustn't mind my ill-temper,

Mrs. Higgs—I've a touch of the brute in me!"

"I don't believe it—you'll do well enough—so will he. We shall jog on 'fortably in Fife Street."

Neal thought so too, when Fife Street had become more like home, and one could believe the lodging-houses, milliners, and cheap day-schools in the place part of the home surroundings. Presently the change from the country would not strike so keenly, and by every little effort it would be easy to imagine that this shabby-genteel neighbourhood, with a back view of a madhouse, was desirably situated, and at a convenient distance from business. He would soon become acclimatized to this—before he had dropped so low, he had fancied that he was *quite* prepared!

At the office next day, doing a little business, and waiting for more; becoming oppressed with the thought that the long law-suit—prosecuted from court of appeal to court of appeal, and brought at last to the House of Lords, where his father fell before the suit was tried, and judgment went in default—had helped to ruin Mr. Tressider as well as Mr. Galbraith. The trade, Shad Thames way, appeared to Neal to be declining—a few letters in

the morning to write, a few minor accounts to post into the ledger, and then it was hard work to get through the day. For what reason did this Mr. Tressider want another clerk? Neal promised himself to be patient; no one seemed excited by the slackness of business, or foreboded any change, and he could afford to wait a little while.

In the afternoon Mr. Walter Tressider came towards Neal, in somewhat of a confused manner.

"I say, Galbraith," he said, biting the nails of his left hand nervously, "it's early days to ask a favour of you, isn't it?"

"What favour is it?"

"Well, it's an uncommon favour, too, and will very much surprise you. But when young men get together—and gentlemen's sons, too, I think I may add—the sooner they are friendly and all that, the better. I want you to join our club."

"Oh! that's impossible."

"We have been getting up, amongst a few of us, a little theatrical company—quite private—and entirely for the amusement of ourselves and friends. It's capital fun, and scarcely any expense."

"It's not in my line," answered Neal; "my his-

trionic abilities would only put you all to the blush."

"Oh! we have plenty of muffs," was the careless answer; "not that I consider you a muff, Galbraith," he added, seeing our hero's cheeks flush; "on the contrary, you have such an extraordinary face for the play of emotion, that you'll be worth any money to us. I'm sure you can act."

"I'm sure that I shall not make the attempt," was the sturdy answer.

"It's not expensive."

"It's not to my taste."

"Will you come and see us rehearse to-night?—you'll find a company of very good fellows. I would no more think of introducing you to a set of snobs, than I would press a fellow who wasn't a gentleman to make one of us."

"Thank you for the indirect compliment, Mr. Tressider, but I really cannot take to the drama."

"You're not a serious young man?" he asked, with visible horror in his face.

"I'm sorry to say, No."

"Pike's a serious young man, you'll find," he added, with a laugh; "take care of him! If ever a man tried to make himself look better than other

people, it's Pike—though he's not a bad sort, mind. Well, I presume, it's no good pressing you any further?"

"Thank you—it really is no good. I am flattered by your singling me out, but our positions are not equal, and I am entirely dependent upon my salary."

"So am I. And what's position to do with it? My name's Tressider, that's all. I'm not likely to be my uncle's heir, or come in for a share of my uncle's money. I'm your fellow-clerk, with a hundred and thirty pounds per annum, which by the blessing of Providence, may be a hundred and fifty some day, when my uncle values me at my just worth."

Neal was somewhat surprised at this revelation; he had almost looked upon Mr. Walter Tressider as a representative of the firm.

Mr. Walter Tressider took Neal's surprise for a change of determination.

"You'll think better of it, Galbraith, won't you?"

"I have a father to support as well as myself—his income is a very small one now—do not ask me to spend a penny on spangles."

Neal spoke with a little hearty contempt; but Walter Tressider did not, or would not perceive it.

"Very well, Galbraith—I like your frankness, I'm of a frank nature myself. I'm going to be particularly frank now, for I have not asked the favour of you yet."

"Indeed!"

"I'm general manager of our company; in fact, though I say it myself, I am the best man of the gang of them. Now, we have been getting up 'Othello' for a friend—at a friend's house—a little birth-day affair for next Thursday, and hanged if *Cassio* hasn't gone to Margate!"

"He will come back in good time, perhaps."

"Oh! no, he's offended—he wanted to play *Iago*, and as it is at young Jennings's house, young Jennings wanted to play *Iago*, and *Othello* too if he could have managed it. You see Jennings wanted a prominent part."

"Very naturally," said Ned.

"You don't know the play, perhaps? You see—"

"I know the play very well, Mr. Tressider."

"All right, then you know we can't get on without *Cassio*."

"Why don't you—"

"My dear fellow, I'm *Othello*!"

"Where's all the gang that you spoke of just now?"

"They have all parts, except those that are out of town. You see August is such a terrible month to keep people together."

"Ah!" said Neal, becoming somewhat weary of the topic.

"Now, if you'll help us at the pinch—learn *Cassio's* part by Thursday evening, you will save a poor fellow from his friend's reproaches, and the ignominy of a failure."

"You will be able to find a substitute without fixing upon a stranger like me. It is utterly impossible that I can help you."

"There'll be some deuced nice girls there," he added, as his last inducement.

"All the greater reason why I shouldn't make myself a fool before them," replied Neal. "I am obliged, but—I can't."

"Or won't—which?"

"Which you like," said Neal, more coldly. "I cannot give you any other answer."

Walter Tressider went away offended; he had failed in his efforts to persuade, and he had an

overweening estimate of his persuasive ability. But he was a man who bore no malice, nevertheless, for in an hour's time he came back to Neal's desk, and asked if he thought that he thoroughly understood the business now.

"Yes ; the system is simple enough."

"The governor has been going in for contracts," he said ; "and there'll be a rare stir presently amongst us if he succeed in getting any. This is the calm before the storm—we do not always take it quite so easily as this, Galbraith."

As Walter Tressider left the office, his uncle came in from his private room, drawing on a pair of gloves carefully as he advanced. A dapper-looking gentleman he looked out of his dressing-gown, buttoned to the chin in a surtout coat, that seemed to render him thinner than ever.

"Anything new, Mr. Pike ?"

"Nothing new, sir."

"What has my scamp of a nephew been amusing you with, Mr. Galbraith—the merits of the last new actor, or the merits of Walter Tressider, Esq. ?"

"Neither, sir."

"Then he is less stage-struck than he used to

be. You will find him a very agreeable companion, and nobody's enemy, but his own—eh, Mr. Pike?"

"Not his own, I hope, sir. There are some good traits of character in Mr. Walter."

"Ah! and not a few bad ones; but, then, we are all bad in this world, after our respective fashions; and Walter only flourishes his faults a little more in the face of society. Where's Radwick?"

"Here I am, sir," said Radwick, looking up with his usual sullen aspect.

"Talking about bad ones, reminds me of your inestimable self. We shall not require your services after Saturday week."

"Very well, sir."

"We're getting slack; and in slack times we weed out the incapables. I'm a patient man, Radwick, but you've tired me out; and I thank God that I can so easily get rid of you. Good afternoon!"

Mr. Tressider seldom raised or lowered his voice—all was one peculiar, ringing, metallic intonation, that told of the hardness of his heart, perhaps. He was evidently a man who let but little disturb him; he had boasted of that fortitude in Neal's first interview with him. He might have dismissed

Radwick more kindly, Neal thought; by-and-bye, perhaps, he should receive his own notice to quit in similar fashion.

"That's you, Mr. Pike," said Radwick, as the master of the firm stepped into his yard. "I'm not sorry. I never liked the place—it's a beggarly hole enough; and he's poor enough, for all his bounce—but it's through you I have the sack."

"Why, what makes you think that?" and all Mr. Pike's bristly hair seemed to grow more erect beneath the charge against him.

"You told him I was not civil, when he asked if I got on well."

"I told him the truth—I always do."

"Oh! of course!" was the ironical answer.

"But I recommended that you should have a fair trial; and I was not prepared for his giving you warning this afternoon."

"Yes, you were."

"You won't believe my word, then?"

"No."

"Then don't. I'm very glad you're going, now."

And Radwick went in due course; and has but been introduced herein to afford an early instance

of Mr. Tressider's decisiveness. Neal did not understand his master any more than the reader does. Neal could not make anyone out very clearly ; there was a foggy atmosphere in this new world of his. He had been faintly flattered by Mr. Walter Tressider's offer of close companionship, and Mr. Pike's interest in him was not wholly unpleasant, though it consisted of warnings and presentation tracts. Mr. Pike, packing up that evening his oil-skin bag, which invariably held a bottle of table-beer, a packet of sandwiches and a penny-loaf, said to our hero, brushing his hat with his sleeve before departure—

“I'm very glad to see you so firm. I thought that you were of an unyielding disposition ; and the tract has helped you a bit, I daresay.”

“I haven't had time to look at it yet.”

“You'll be pleased with its style,” said Mr. Pike ; “very simple, but very clear. I'm not going your way to-night. It's my Addie's birthday, and I know a shop in Dockhead where things are very reasonable. Good day !”

Mr. Pike hurried away, and Neal went home alone, meeting not with his father by the way. The next day Mr. Walter Tressider did not ap-

pear at business until four in the afternoon; he had been rattling about town all day after "the properties," he told Neal. He was in excellent spirits also; a *Cassio* had been found in another quarter, and all was flowing on peacefully and gently to a favourable consummation. On the Thursday he sat at his desk all day, learning his part from a dogs-eared book, which he hid under the ledger when his uncle entered, but which he made no attempt to conceal from the senior clerk.

That senior clerk at last remonstrated.

"Has that estimate been copied, Mr. Tressider?"

"Oh! to-morrow will do for that, Pike," was the careless answer. "It's not required to be sent in until the beginning of next week. It's all right."

"Your uncle wishes to see a fair copy this afternoon."

"Can't—can't Galbraith knock it off?"

"No."

"You might oblige a fellow for once, Pike."

"If you were profitably employing your time, I might—as it is, I really cannot."

"Then you must do the other thing, Mr. Pike," said Walter, severely. "It isn't very often I ask

a favour of anybody, and when I do I object to being burked. This isn't a cut at you, Galbraith," he called across Mr. Pike's desk, "for not helping me at a pinch. I forget, forgive, and am 'hail fellow well met !' the very instant after my enemy has tried to rip me up the back in the dark. Here, Pike, I'll forgive you, and subscribe to the next collection at that little howling-shop in your street. What a row they make of a Sunday morning, to be sure !"

"That'll do, Mr. Tressider—that'll do, please," said David Pike, somewhat flustered.

"Well, but they do howl horribly, Pike."

"Never mind, it'll be your turn to howl Shakspeare to-night, and for your friends to sneer at *you* !"

"Oh !"

Mr. Tressider did not relish the retort, but he laughed off the effect, after a moment's consideration.

"I shall make a success of it."

"All the worse for you, sir."

"Why ?"

"It will be one step further on the devil's road, and you'll make it rejoicingly. Oh ! why don't

you give up this play-acting folly, and turn to something more serious, if you must have a hobby. It's wrong—upon my honour, Mr. Tressider—it's really wrong !”

“ You think so, really ?”

“ I do, indeed !” said David Pike, quite earnestly ; “ even in a worldly sense, it's wrong for you. It gives you unbusiness-like habits, and makes honest work toilsome. If you ever left your uncle, you would find how right I am.”

“ But I've promised to-night. I can't break my word, you know. Afterwards I'll really think seriously of what you have said. Here's the estimate, Mr. Pike, and I am very much obliged to you.”

He passed the papers on to the desk of his fellow-clerk, and Mr. Pike, after a bewildered look at him, and a half-protest against the imposition, suffered them to remain where they were, and shortly afterwards turned his attention to them.

This kept Mr. Pike late at his post, and Neal went home alone again. He took his father that night for a walk in St. James's Park, and came back as the clocks were striking nine.

Mrs. Higgs admitted them into the house, and

followed them up-stairs to their drawing-room. She was looking pale and agitated.

“Keep your hat on, Master Neal, I want you to help an old woman and a young one—me and my niece,. Will you?”

“To be sure I will.”

CHAPTER VIII.

SPECIAL SERVICE.

A SHORT, thick-set, hard-featured man, shabbily attired, and wearing a napless hat, short and thick-set, like himself, had stumped down Fife Street half an hour before, and knocked at Mrs. Higgs's door.

Mrs. Higgs had stared aghast at her visitor, and asked if anything were wrong; and her visitor had not condescended to afford any information until he had entered her parlour, and sat down with his hands in his pockets, and his inflexible hat pulled over his brows. He sat in the full light of the window, and discovered a dirty face as well as a hard one, looking a trifle more dusky for his stubbly chin, and ratty-grey whiskers, which hung at all lengths about his soiled shirt-collar. Altogether an unpleasant man to look at, and a worse to speak to.

"Well, who would have thought of you giving me a call, Webber?" Mrs. Higgs said.

"I thought of it, or I shouldn't have been here, should I?" was the reply to this.

"Looking at it in that light, Mr. W., praps not."

"Where's Carry?"

Mrs. Higgs was quick to respond, quick to see the screw loose in the social machinery of home; and although as ignorant of Carry's whereabouts as the gentleman addressing her, answered quite smartly—

"Didn't she tell you that she was going shopping for me?"

"Shopping!—what have you sent her shopping for?"

"She's more taste than I have, and is quite able, I think, to choose a bright meriner for me, which it'd look suitable for my age—and the Lord forgive me all these heaps of 'varications!' she added, in a lower tone.

Mr. Webber gave a grunt, and sat scowling at the carpet ferociously. He looked up at last, and said with an emphatic nod:

"I'll wait till she comes back, then."

"She can find her way home well enough—you needn't be afraid of the crossings."

"I never was."

"I thought something had happened at home, you coming here so seldom as you do."

"What have I got to come here for?"

"Well—nothing much," Mrs. Higgs was compelled to reply.

"I've come here for Carry, because I thought that she'd been up to her tricks, and wanted to do me. And I ain't to be done, like her fool of a mother!"

"No," said Mrs. Higgs, in a negative sort of affirmative response.

"And not to be done by my own gal has brought me here—not any wish to see you—don't flatter yourself!"

"I don't."

"And don't give me any of *your* sharp answers, because I never could stomach them. I'm plain, matter-of-fact, to the purpose, Josiah Webber—a man who always speaks his mind!"

"I'm not thinking of being sharp, Webber—why should I? Will you take anything?—will you take your hat off?"

"I won't take either one or the other—I'll take Carry home when I have got a chance."

"If she's gone to the West End shops—she'll be rather late. You don't get first-class meriners this end of the town."

"Mrs. Higgs, I can't recollect at any time you telling me a downright lie," said Mr. Webber, crossing his arms upon his broad chest, and glinting at his sister-in-law from under the rim of his shabby beaver; "or I should be inclined to think that you're at it now, pretty strong."

Mrs. Higgs paled a little at this insinuation, but held her ground still. Had he not looked so intently into her face, he would have perceived the withered hand upon the table, shaking very much as it held fast to one corner.

"There's no denying the fact, that Carry is a sly girl—I have always said so—I have always thought so. I think that she was made slyer at that damned boarding-school, where she found lots of fine friends, and got her head turned with their finery. Now, I hate sly people—people who say one thing and mean another."

"Which Carry does not, I hope."

"I don't know that," said this iron being,

talking at the top of his voice, which, when at the top, was strong enough for Exeter Hall platform purposes ; “ she said she was coming here to spend the afternoon and evening with you—that she promised you last Sunday—and I guessed what little game she was up to, for I’m pretty sharp in *my* way. Ask anybody who knows Webber, if I ain’t.”

“ I wouldn’t too readily ’spect my own child, if I was you. It’s bad.”

“ Never you mind what’s bad. I don’t ’spect, as you call it, for nothing generally,” he said, with a withering sneer at his sister-in-law’s ignorance ; “ and I hate anyone trying to impose upon me. Her mother tried it when she was a young woman, but it wouldn’t do ; Joe tried it before he was a young man, and I turned him out of doors.”

“ Ah ! God help him !—yes,” cried the woman, with a pathos that would have affected men more easily impressed than her visitor.

“ Ah ! you made a fine fuss about that—I didn’t. You, being his godmother, thought you had a right to bully me, I suppose, about it. But it served him right—it was his own fault—I’ve never been sorry for acting so, and being quit of such a scamp !”

"To think a man should talk so of his own son ! —oh ! I'd rather not listen, Webber. Please, go home !"

"I like to be just, but when I'm just, I'm firm ; I put my foot down *so*," said this harsh man, with a stamp of one unwieldy boot, that shook every window in the house ; "and heaven and earth ain't likely to make me move it, till I choose!"

"No," said Mrs. Higgs, with one of her strange negative-affirmatives again.

"And if Carry's going after her brother, as though it was in her blood somehow, and all our care can't keep her straight, but only seems to render her more artful—why, you may take care of her if you like, for, by all that's holy, I won't!"

"Mind what you're saying," said Mrs. Higgs ; "you can't frighten me with your big words, and I don't care so much for 'em but what I'll speak my mind in my own house. You never 'served a son or daughter, for you only cared to keep 'em down, and you'll 'member all your bad words when you ain't so strong and fierce as you are now. You ain't kind, Webber, and you never was."

"I like fairness, and I don't get it. If being kind is to spend my money on company-keeping,

and dressing Carry out for company, I'm a brute in every sense of the word. And if I don't keep my children down when they're young, won't they fly into my face and spit at me when they're older?—I know the world too well to doubt that."

"You know the worst of the world, I think," said Mrs. Higgs, still hovering on the verge of retort, and too much a woman of spirit to be easily subdued.

"What does Carry want with friends?—*fine friends?*" he added disparagingly; "they're not fit for her or her family. I'm not fine, Johannah isn't fine; I've plenty of money—I don't mind owning that—but I'm not going to waste it in keeping up a show for fools to see me spend it. Carry went to boarding-school to finish her education, not to make friends—to be a comfort to me, and not an insult to my understanding, like her mother's grammar is. I didn't want an ignorant girl about the house, but I didn't want a fine, two-faced, deceitful minx as she is."

"Don't say so."

"And you know that she's off, after all, to these Jenningses—that she's as obstinate as a mule, and

always was—though where the devil she got her obstinacy from, I don't know. And you want to put *me* on the wrong scent—ha ! ha ! that's a good joke. Now, hark here."

Mrs. Higgs hearkened with great attention.

"I'll wait here till she comes back on your errand, and take her home with me. I'm in no hurry, I'll give her a fair chance—eleven, twelve say. And if she don't come, why, I shall know that you've been lying, and I shan't care to see you at my house again. And at twelve o'clock—a nice time for shopping!—I'll go home and lock up, and she may call in the morning for my good opinion of her."

At this juncture the knock came, and Mr. Webber for a minute looked discomfited.

"My lodgers, I think," said Mrs. Higgs; and then had ensued the lodgers' admittance, and the hurried adjuration as recorded at the end of the last chapter.

"To be sure I will help you. What is it?" asked Neal.

"My niece has gone without telling her father or mother to a party at Richmond, and her father has found it out. He's a very stern man, quite a

brute, though I say it myself, and the Lord knows what may be the 'sult of this. I've told him, heaven forgive me, more lies to-night than I ever hope to tell again to save that gal—for oh! he's mortal hard, and I know what he did to his own son, who might have been so different! He may turn her out of doors a'most, or say things that'll make her turn herself out, for she's obstinate like him. You, Master Neal, will go to Richmond for me by the train from Vauxhall, and bring her here at once just as if she had been a-shopping, as I've told him, mind—oh dear! And make all the haste you can, for he goes home at twelve to lock her out, and then who knows what may happen! There's a good lad—quietly down the stairs—the name's Jennings—they've a villa at Richmond—Mark's villa—you're sure to find it."

Mrs. Higgs dashed downstairs again, and Neal prepared to obey her behest, catching her excitement partly.

"This is an odd affair," he said.

"Very odd!" replied his father to his astonishment; "very wrong of the girl—very wrong of the father—all wrong together, Neal!"

"You understand it."

"Yes, I think so."

"It hasn't excited you in any way, father?"

"N—no. Mrs. Higgs runs in and out rather suddenly, and shakes one up a bit—that's all."

"Then I'll just see you into bed before I go, or I shall find you in Fife Street by the time I come back. Come, father."

"Bed!"

"You're tired—you've had a long walk—early to bed is the Galbraith motto, dad."

"But I've had no supper."

"Mother Higgs shall bring it you when you are comfortably disposed of—this way, sir—I've no time to lose."

The father bowed to the will of his son; there was no resisting it, he felt assured, so he went to bed obedient and uncomplaining. Neal saw his father comfortably tucked up, and then, with an injunction to get to sleep till supper-time, which was faithfully promised, Neal went softly down the stairs and out of the house.

"This is an odd turn, and an odd story," said Neal; "but it will save no end of confusion, and here goes in search of adventures! I don't know how many nieces Mrs. Higgs possesses, but I hope

it's the fair-haired one who refused my consolation on Sunday last."

Off went Neal at a rapid pace, till he came to the cab-stand between Bethlehem Hospital and the "Stags" public-house in the Kennington Road.

"I suppose Mrs. Higgs will stand all expenses," said this prudent youth. "Richmond isn't far, I hope—and there's the girl to bring back—I hope the money will run to it. Richmond!—Jennings!—by George! it must be the private theatrical party Walter Tressider mentioned. How did Mrs. Higgs's niece manage to get there?"

He was in the cab, and rattling towards Vauxhall Station by that time—up Kennington Road, and Upper Kennington Lane, and there he was at the railway station.

"Next train to Richmond, when is it?" he cried to the first official whom he met in the booking-office.

"Train just up, sir."

"Too late!" cried the clerk, endeavouring to drop the trap before the pigeon hole, and stopped by Neal's strong hand.

"No, it isn't!" shouted Neal; "pass us a ticket—I'll chance it—life and death, sir—third class return, there's a good fellow!"

The clerk, carried away by our hero's excitement, passed the ticket as requested, and Neal scoured up the steps, on to the platform, and into the first open door of the train, now slowly moving on—into the guard's compartment, along with the break, and considerably astonishing the guard, who had jumped in after him, and closed the door.

"Hollo, here!"

"All right—I'm in a hurry, and I should have missed the train. I wouldn't have missed it for any money."

"Praps not, but you oughtn't to have come in here—it's against the rules—it's likely to get me in a row."

"If you had a grandmother dying to see you, and dying of dropsy, you wouldn't stand upon ceremony?" said Neal.

"Oh! if it's so bad as that," said the man, softening, "I've nothing to say."

"I've caught this lying complaint of Mother Higgs," muttered Neal to himself, as the train whirled him along through the night. He was soon at Richmond; reckless of expenditure, he dashed at the only fly waiting at the station, and

was wrenching open the door, when arrested by the flyman.

"Hold hard there, sir!—engaged, sir! Waiting for a gentleman by this train."

"The deuce you are!" said Neal; "where's Mr. Jennings's villa?"

"A mile and aarf good," said the flyman—"are you going there?"

"Yes—which way—I'll run it."

"The race is not always to the swift, Mr. Galbraith."

Neal jumped, and faced the speaker, no less a personage than the senior Mr. Tressider.

"Good evening, sir—you are going to see your nephew perform, I hope."

"U-u-u-ugh! I hope not," said Mr. Tressider, with a shudder; "I am going down late on purpose to avoid that infliction."

"I am sent on a message to the villa—may I ride on the box?"

"Certainly not."

"Sir, I——"

"But you may get inside with me—look sharp, and don't keep me in the draught."

Master and servant entered the fly, and away

they went once more. Mr. Tressider loosened the buckle of the cloak he was wearing, took his hat off, and then curled himself so far back in the carriage, that he was almost invisible to Neal.

"You know the Jennings lot, Mr. Galbraith?"

"No, sir."

"Mr. Jennings is in the metal trade—a very wealthy man. You may have heard your father speak of him?"

"No, sir."

"This is a singular meeting," said Mr. Tressider, after a pause. "You are not bound on a mission of pleasure, I can see!"

It was difficult to see much in that dark interior, but Mr. Tressider had good eyes.

"No, sir. I am here to oblige a friend, and escort a lady back with me—that's all."

"What lady?"

"Miss Webber."

"Ah! I don't know her. It's all very singular, but I'm not a curious man, and singular things are best avoided, although I never let them excite me. Shall we change the subject?"

"If you please, sir."

"My nephew did not make an actor of you after all, then?"

"I could not afford the time, sir ; and I am not fond of acting."

"It's a nice amusement—for young people idly disposed," said Mr. Tressider. "Old people, like me, attend these revels for the sake of the supper, or for the sake of old friends they may meet at the re-union. You do not stay?"

"Not five minutes, if I can avoid it!"

"The fly shall wait for you. I have engaged the equipage for the night, and there's no extra expense. Don't you find it jolt very much?"

"Not so springy as it might be, sir."

"Once upon a time I should have come down here in my own carriage ; but I have given up such vanities. I begin to fancy that I can't afford them."

"How far are we now, sir?"

"I really cannot tell—we shall be there in good time. I was awake all last night—do you mind me having a nap?" he asked, quite courteously.

"Not at all, Mr. Tressider."

"Thank you—you're very good."

Mr. Tressider went to sleep, or was silent for the rest of the journey. In due course the wheels of the fly grated on the gravelled drive skirting a

house, whose many windows were full of light, and significant of revelry.

The door was opened before they were out of the fly—a man with a lantern, letting down the steps, looked at Neal's shooting-jacket with evident distrust. To the man at the open door Neal tendered his card, on which he had found time to write, *Immediate and important!*

"Give that card to Miss Webber, off or on the stage, and show me to a private room, where I can see that lady alone. Off or on the stage, remember."

"Ye-es, sir."

A gentleman crossing the hall in full-dress, old and shrivelled, like an American apple, caught sight of Mr. Tressider.

"Ah! Tressider," he said, advancing, "so you have favoured us, then? They're doing it very well indeed."

"What! haven't they finished? They began early enough!"

"They're getting on. Who—who's this?" in a lower voice.

"Oh! a friend whom I have dropped upon coming hither—Mr. Galbraith."

"Gal—Galbraith! Good Gad! sir, did you say Galbraith?"

Mr. Tressider gave a quiet chuckle of satisfaction at his friend's astonishment.

"Only a messenger on special service—singular coincidence—son of Old Bill Gal, as we used to call him. Shall I introduce you?"

"No, no. James, show this young gentleman into the breakfast-room, and attend to his wishes."

"This way, sir."

Neal was ushered, along the whole extent of the hall, by the lacquey.

"I'm bewildered, Tressider. Is it a message to me?" said Mr. Jennings. "What does it mean?"

"It's nothing to do with you, my dear sir, and therefore means nothing. He's something like his father about the forehead, but not quite so top-heavy. Don't you think so?"

"I—I don't know. There he goes—into the breakfast-parlour, and I forgot that—that—they'd made a dressing-room of it behind the stage. What a fool I am!"

"History does not say so, Jennings," remarked his friend.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ANTI-CLIMAX.

THE breakfast-parlour of the Jennings's establishment communicated by a side-door with the dining-room, in which a stage had been erected for the proper performance of Shakspeare's "Othello," consequently the breakfast-parlour had been turned into a green-room for the occasion, and had been found very handy for entrances and exits.

Neal was unprepared for a green-room—still less for a number of gentlemen, and one lady, in masquerade attire, waiting their cues, and standing in groups together. There was a general stare of astonishment in his direction as the door closed, and shut him in with this motley crew of players.

Neal bowed somewhat clumsily in his confusion, looked round for a friendly face, and failed in finding it.

"I beg pardon," said Neal; "I requested a private room, in which to see Miss Webber for an instant."

"Hush! hush!" said *Iago*, evidently *Iago*, he had corked his eyebrows so bountifully; "you'll be heard in the dining-room, and spoil it. Miss Webber's on the stage."

"Where's young Mr. Tressider?"

"He's going to do the smothering—for goodness sake, don't talk so loud! Is anything the matter?"

"I must see Miss Webber at once—I regret to interrupt your piece, but it is important in the highest degree that I should see her."

"It'll all be over in ten minutes," said *Iago*, with tears in his eyes; "do talk a little less loud, there's a good fellow, or you'll mull it all!"

"Who is it?" asked *Emilia—Emilia* for that period, Miss Jennings after the fifth act; "why don't you introduce me?"

"I don't know him—do keep quiet. 'Too late's' your cue. Why don't you listen?" snapped *Iago*, just as *Iago* was prone to snap *Emilia* in the side scenes of Venetian life, perhaps.

The voice of Walter Tressider was heard reverberating through the door—followed by Miss

Webber's voice—the last conjugal dispute between *Othello* and *Desdemona* was rapidly progressing.

“Othello.—Think on thy sins.

Desdemona.—They are loves, I bear to you.

Othello.—Ay! and for that, thou dy'st.

Des.—That death's unnatural that kills for loving.

Alas! why gnaw you so your nether lip?

Some bloody passion shakes your very frame:

These are portents; but yet I hope, I hope,

They do not point on me.

Othello.—Peace and be still!

Des.—I will so. What's the matter?”

“If you please, Miss Webber,” cried a sonorous voice at this juncture, *“I was to give you this at once. The gentleman's waiting.”*

A long pause of dismay on the stage, in the dressing-room, in the dining-room, where the visitors were sitting, and then one long, loud, unextinguishable burst of laughter, that seemed to rock the house. The servant had fulfilled his commission by coolly stepping on the stage and parting husband and wife with a salver.

In an instant, Walter Tressider, with a black face, rushed in a frenzy to the green-room.

"Whose doing is this?—that cursed flunkey!—lower the curtain!—what the devil does it all mean!—here's a pretty mess!"

Desdemona came in the instant afterwards—the laughter was still at its height, echoing peal after peal on the ears of the dismayed players. *Desdemona*, or Miss Webber, flushed, excited, and bewildered, with her hair dishevelled, and in her white dress looking very beautiful, followed *Othello*. The servant came running after them, full of horror at the deed he had committed, and was immediately garotted by *Iago*.

"You thundering, blundering blackguard! what do you mean by this?" yelled his young master in his ears.

"You are from Fife Street!—what has happened?—what do you want here?" cried Miss Webber to our hero.

"I have been sent for you—it is very important that you should return home at once with me."

"Nobody ill?—dead!—father!—mother!—Joe!"

"No, no—pray calm yourself—nothing has occurred of so serious a nature as that!"

"Then if nobody's dead, it's a damned shame!" said *Othello*; "and—why, it's Galbraith!"

"Miss Webber, will you step this way with me, for an instant?" said Neal; "I cannot explain before this lady and these gentlemen."

Caroline Webber, turning white and red, followed our hero to the door. She was trembling with fear, or passion, or both, and yet excited by the mystery. The cool hall was quiet enough for the news.

"Mrs. Higgs has sent me—your father is waiting at her house. He is likely to be very angry if you remain from home any longer."

"Does he know that I am here?"

"I believe that he only suspects it—Mrs. Higgs having hinted that—that you were absent shopping for her."

"I can't go home like this—I won't go home!"

"Pray think better of it," urged Neal, "he returns home at twelve to lock you out, I'm told. You must forgive me delivering such a message to a lady."

"Lock me out!" mused Caroline, her face becoming scarlet for a moment, and then deadly pale; "well, let him."

Yes, she inherited her father's obstinacy of temperament—her red lips closed together with deci-

sion, and her little hands doubled themselves into balls of snow, that no sun seemed ever likely to melt.

"Let him—let him!" she repeated.

Miss Jennings appeared in this instant from the dressing-room.

"May I ask *what* is the matter, Carry?"

"My foolish wish to keep my promise and not spoil your play, has been found out—and, after all, I have covered you with shame!"

"Oh! never mind that—we've amused the people by our new reading, and they're laughing still. We shall laugh presently—your father knows you have come hither."

"Yes."

"Then I would go back to him—I would go at once, Carry dear."

"I don't like to be served like this—to be treated like a slave—a child without a will or a wish of my own!"

"Miss Webber," said Neal, "I'm afraid that it is nearly eleven o'clock."

"Perhaps I had better go," said Carry, dashing her angry tears away; "have you a fly outside?"

"Yes."

"I'll be with you in five minutes."

Carry Webber hurried away with her friend, and Neal went out of the hall to the fly, and took his place, like a good young man who valued appearances, upon the box. He alighted to assist Miss Webber into the vehicle, when she came hurrying out of the house a few minutes afterwards. A rapid drive to the station, Neal enlisting the flyman's sympathy by the way—and then Miss Webber on the platform, and our hero procuring her a ticket, and inquiring about the next train.

He came quite joyfully towards her at last.

"Good luck, Miss Webber!" he cried; "there's a train in five minutes, that goes direct to Waterloo without stopping, and it wants twenty minutes to eleven now!"

"That was the train I intended to have returned by."

"You would have missed it."

"Yes—it looks like it now," said she, half petulantly; "but there is another train after this—and I had a hope that father would go to bed early. All this seems very wrong to you, Mr. Galbraith?" she added quickly.

"N—no, not exactly wrong," he replied, politely;

"I haven't heard the full particulars—and I only guess that there has been a promise fulfilled on your part, at the hazard of giving great offence to your father."

It was a graceful way of putting it for a youth not twenty years of age, and pleased Miss Webber wonderfully.

"Yes—that is the truth. I should have spoiled their play at Richmond, and I did not think quite so much as I should have done of the dangers of my determination."

"Dangers!"

"Oh! you don't know—you can't guess, sir, the danger of offending such a father as I am blessed with!" she cried, passionately; "no one ever had such a cold-hearted father before!—I'm the most miserable girl in all the world!"

She burst into tears, wild and uncontrollable, and frightened poor Neal with her impetuosity. He had not seen a young woman cry very often—and it almost made him want to cry to keep her company.

"My dear Miss Webber, don't go on like this—he's a little hard in his way, but you mayn't understand him exactly. A father must love his

child, just as naturally as a child must love its father. I can't understand anything clearer than that. What is there to cry about?"

"Let me be a minute—how tiresome you are!"

She went away from him to a corner of the platform, and sat down. Neal did not intrude upon her grief until the train was heard clanking its way towards them.

"Here's the train, Miss Webber. You'll—you'll not object to third-class—I took anything in my hurry."

"I'm used to the worst of everything," she responded, severely.

"Then this will just suit," said Neal, almost severely in his turn.

Neal conducted Miss Webber into a third-class compartment, and took his place beside her. A woman, with a basket, and a soldier with his eyes shut, and his head half off, were the other occupants of that compartment. A whistle from the engine, and then at full speed to London.

Carry Webber remained silent and stolid for some time—the place was dark enough, and Neal could not tell, even had she worn no veil, whether she were crying still.

But Carry Webber's nature was an April one, as befitted her youth. A musical laugh suddenly startled Neal, and frightened the soldier for an instant out of slumber.

"Was there ever anything more ridiculous!" she said; "Mr. Tressider making up his mind to murder me, and I playing *Desdemona* with all my heart and soul; and then that stupid servant with your card. I begin to see how the visitors must have enjoyed the variation!"

"I am afraid that it was my fault. I said 'off or on the stage' in my excitement; but I did not want the man to ruin the effect of the catastrophe."

"We were proceeding so famously, too!"

"You are fond of private theatricals?"

"Fond of anything that offers me the prospect of a change, Mr. Galbraith."

"Indeed!"

"For I see no change. I am not allowed to stir out of doors without a hundred questions; it is too expensive to have friends at home—it is too expensive to seek friends abroad. You cannot wonder if I be a little discontented now and then—even, now and then, if I be a little rebellious."

Neal said, out of politeness, that he could not wonder at it.

"But I try to do my best—of course I do! I try to make believe that I am very happy, and contented. What kind of man is *your* father?" she asked abruptly.

"Before his illness, a firm man in his way, but still all that I could wish—ever the dearest and best of fathers to me."

"And your mother?"

"She died when I was a child; but I can remember her—the best of mothers, too."

"What a happy life!—what a different girl I should have been with a mother and father like yours! But then your father was a gentleman once?"

"A gentleman ever, Miss Webber."

"I mean a gentleman in position; and somehow there is a difference between gentlemen born rich, and men who have made themselves riches—don't you think so?"

"Sometimes—not always."

"My father did one foolish thing in life, in giving me 'a finishing education.' He wanted me a clever girl, he said, at any expense; and he

should have kept me down, and sent me to some school in the Borough Road. I should have known my place then, and been more content with it."

"I—I wouldn't cry any more, Miss Webber."

"I'm not going—don't be alarmed," she answered, pertly.

"Have you known Mr. Tressider long, Miss?"

It was her turn to start at this.

"Mr. Tressider—why?"

"Because he is a fellow-clerk of mine."

"That's very strange! Do you like him?"

"I have not seen a great deal of him yet. He appears a good-tempered fellow."

"And very clever too! I do not believe that any amateur can play *Othello* like him. I think that he will take to the stage, and become famous."

"He does not think so, I hope?"

"Why?"

"Because it must be rather hard work to become famous," replied our hero.

"He would work his way—he thinks that he is a genius himself."

"Well, that's a little towards it," said Neal, only partly convinced still.

"And he's fit for something better than slaving at a desk all day ; besides, he don't agree with his uncle—and he's too good for a clerk."

"Is he, now ?"

Our hero did not relish these encomiums on Mr. Walter Tressider ; he could not assign a reason for considering Mr. Tressider a distasteful subject, not being aware that no man cares to sit down and hear another very much bepraised.

Miss Webber did not bepraise Mr. Tressider, however, to any inordinate extent ; she darted away from the topic to her own griefs once more. She was never reserved upon them ; and Neal pitied her, and thought what a dreadful father and mother she must have to put up with. And whilst he was pitying her with all his heart, her musical laugh at that evening's absurdity rang out again.

Close upon Waterloo Station, she said—

"Now, tell me all the particulars of my father's visit to Mrs. Higgs."

He related them, so far as he had been made acquainted with the same.

"What would you do ?"

"I ! Oh ! I should tell them exactly the truth,

and promise not to do it again. I'd chance it."

"Would you? And if your father turned you out of doors?"

"He would not do that."

"He turned my brother out of doors because he went a little wrong—not much. He wouldn't give him another chance then—my own brother!"

"Ah! that was different; your brother was a man, who could rough it a bit."

"He was not so old as you by two or three years. He wasn't twenty."

"More am I, for that matter."

"Oh! dear! What an old-looking boy you are, then!"

"So people tell me."

"And how old you talk!" she said laughing.

"But why would not he turn me out of doors? Where's the difference?"

"You're his daughter—too young, and good, and pretty, to be treated roughly. Why, I'm sure he wouldn't be very hard upon *you*!"

They were at the station now, and he could see that Carry Webber was blushing, and not at all displeased by his assertion. It was Neal's candid

opinion, and not intended for flattery, so the remark was received all the more gratefully.

"We'll have a cab to the end of Fife Street—shall we?"

"If you please; there's a stationer's open," she said, as they emerged into the Waterloo Road; "wait a minute for me."

She ran across the road, and shortly returned, with a roll of brown-paper in her hands.

"I haven't quite done acting to-night," she said, saucily.

The cab was procured, and soon put them down at the corner of Fife Street. Emerging from the cab, it might have been seen that Miss Webber had a brown-paper parcel neatly tied in her hands. Neal, who had chastely ridden on the box once more—from what Galbraith had he inherited this modesty?—looked at the parcel in wonderment.

"Why, how have you managed it?"

"Never mind, sir—if you wish to see the last act of this comedy, I give you full permission to listen at the parlour door."

"Thank you," said this unheroic hero of ours. "I think I will."

At Mrs. Higgs's door, and knocking thereat

loudly. Mrs. Higgs responded, and would have commenced a hasty whisper, had not Carry forestalled her by talking very loudly, and sweeping her aunt along with her into the parlour.

“Oh! this tiresome merino dress of yours, aunt! I couldn’t get a mulberry—a real mulberry—anywhere! I’m worn to death!—I’ve been half-way down the Edgeware Road after the thing—what will father say!”

Father—sitting exactly in the same position, with his hands in his pockets, and his heavy hat still wedged over his forehead—growled out something, not particularly distinct, about the foolery of it all, and then the door closed; and Neal, altering his mind about listening, went upstairs, whistling long and plaintively.

In the drawing-room Neal found the supper-tray laid for him, and after one look at his father above stairs, he descended to partake of the good things which Mrs. Higgs had provided.

He got up from his seat when he heard some one talking in the passage, and opened the window softly to see the last of Carry Webber. Would she think anything more about him?—he suddenly remembered that she had not even bidden him

good-night ! It all had been a capital joke, getting the best of old Webber, if he were the brute that everybody said he was, his own daughter included. And he was sure that Miss Webber would not have acted so slyly, unless there had been a reason for it. He was inclined to make every excuse for Miss Webber.

He peeped cautiously out of the window—no, there she was going away with her father, without a thought of him who had taken so much trouble to save her from a scolding. He found that he had come to the window with the bread in his hand, and the happy idea seized him of picking off a small piece from the crusty corner he had cut himself, and dropping it lightly on Carry Webber's bonnet. She would then look up and smile good night at him.

He leaned out, and, horror of horrors ! dropped his heavy corner crust, which came with a thud on Mr. Webber's hat, and sounded like a cannon-shot in Fife Street.

"Why, what the devil !" exclaimed Mr. Webber, stooping to pick up the missile which had rebounded into the road ; "here, Mrs. Higgs, the sooner you trot that mad lodger of yours into Bed-

lam, the better it'll be for him. He's flinging lumps of bread at me!"

Neal had darted back in dismay, knocked his head against the window frame in confusion, and was sitting half-stunned in the corner of the room. So he saw no more of Carry Webber, although he fancied that the old suppressed music of her laugh sounded for an instant in his ears.

He closed the window and resumed his supper after a while.

"What a pretty girl she is!" he murmured; "I wish she hadn't——"

He said no more, but stared before him at the opposite wall, whereon was a framed profile in black paper of Mrs. Higgs of earlier days, when she was a Miss Putnam, and had not been tempted into matrimony.

What did Neal wish that she had not done? Gone on the sly to Richmond to play *Desdemona*—deceived her father on her return, recking not of the more plain advice that he had offered her?

We have a right to dive to the innermost depths of our hero's thoughts, and we have, moreover, a great respect for our reader's curiosity. Neal Galbraith wished—that Carry Webber had not called him an old-looking boy!

CHAPTER X.

ADDIE.

MRS. HIGGS settled accounts with Neal Galbraith the next morning, bringing up a jingling little bag of wash-leather for that purpose. Neal would have preferred to have taken all the credit to himself now, and incurred every atom's worth of the expense; he was inclined to feel very independent when the money question was mooted by his landlady.

"It's—it's always such a difficult thing, Mrs. Higgs, to take money from a lady. I wish——"

"If you think you're going to pay for my niece's gallivantings, you're very much 'taken, Master Neal," she said; "I'll settle with her, and she'll settle with me—and if she don't, why, I shan't regret the money so much as all the 'awful stories I had to tell last night."

"Is her father very stern, Mrs. Higgs?"

"He might be milder," she said ; "he's at his wust when he's put out, and he was at his wust last night. I've knowed him different, just a little—when he's had a good order like."

"What a life for her!—eh, Mrs, Higgs?"

"Yes, but she bears it pretty well—she's fit to cope with him, take it altogether. Though they're my relations, they ain't one of 'em as I should like to see 'em ; there's something cross-grained in 'em, and it comes out and spoils the pattern."

"But she——"

"She's a nice gal in her way, but put her out of her way, there's a spice of the family in her—and yet I like that gal, as if she was my own flesh and blood. No gal can do better or be more loveable if she likes. There's good and bad in her, as there is in most of us, I 'pose. Where's your father this morning?"

"He's getting up—he'll be down presently."

"There's a difference in him already."

"Do you see it?" said Neal, his face brightening ;
"I didn't like to ask you quite so soon, but I have fancied so myself."

"He's getting better—you may 'pend upon it he'll come round."

"Oh! the glorious days of his better strength and clearer mind, Mrs. Higgs!" cried Neal; "he taking care of me, instead of me taking care of him—positions changed, and 'as you were,' the last order of the Commanding Officer."

"He must have been a good father, for you to love him like you do."

"Why, you know what a man he was—and how everybody liked him. And the boy's love hasn't grown less, now the man's—would you really take me for a man now, Mrs. Higgs?" and Neal drew himself up to his full extent.

"To be sure I would."

"Not a—an old-looking sort of boy, now?"

"No, a man."

"I've all a man's thoughts—I was a man at sixteen, when the trouble first came, and there was a man's work before me. Ah! good morning, father—Mrs. Higgs and I were talking about you."

"You're very kind. No backbiting, I hope—no grumbling at the trouble I am to the two of you."

"Not much of that, at present."

"You'll be late for office, if you don't mind. You should not have waited for me—if I'm a trifle

irregular in my rising still, you must learn method and rule, Neal."

"I'll be at the office as the clock strikes nine, sir."

"That's right."

Neal kept his word. At nine o'clock to the minute, he entered the office, ascending the steps at the same time with David Pike. An interchange of good mornings, and then real business commencing—for there was a little more briskness about the office that day.

"We've got one contract for iron railings, from Bitts the builders—forty miles of them," said Mr. Pike; "Mr. Tressider will want a letter off to Birmingham to-day. It's young Tressider's pattern, too, that is chosen, and that will please *him*. He's a clever young man, but—what's the good of being clever, if one hasn't a mind of his own."

"Hasn't he, then?"

"I am afraid not," said Mr. Pike; "I like a man who goes *right* on his road, and don't flinch because a storm comes up, or something out of the way attracts him from his first pursuit. That was my father's idea—mine—I hope it'll be yours, young man. But I fancy *this* is not attending to Mr. Tressider's business."

Mr. Tressider, senior, entered, to attend to his own, a few minutes afterwards. The head of the house was irregular in his movements, and it was difficult to be certain of him. Sometimes Mr. Pike would find him at nine in the morning, busy at work at his nephew's desk, as though early-rising and industrious habits were rather in his way than otherwise.

"I shall want you to go down to Birmingham, Pike, this afternoon."

"You couldn't spare me this morning, perhaps?"

"Why?"

"It would suit me better—I might manage to reach home by to-morrow afternoon, then."

"I'm in no hurry."

"But I am, sir, if you will excuse me."

"Domestic reasons, Pike?"

"Yes, sir, my Addie—a girl I don't like to leave too long alone, brave as she is. And of course she's always alone, if I'm out."

"May I ask who Addie is?"

"My late sister's child, sir; my sister and her husband," with a sudden spasmodic gulp, that turned him red in the face, "were drowned

at sea, sir, in the *Culloden*, going to Canada—don't you remember?"

"Something about it—I never let other people's affairs keep on my mind long—it's the worst habit in the world."

"And though it's of no consequence to you, sir," added Pike, a little disturbed by his employer's coolness, "the child was saved!"

"Pity it had not gone to the bottom along with its parents, and so all to heaven of a bunch! You wouldn't have been hampered with a baby to bring up——"

"Hampered, sir!" cried Pike.

"Why, how old was the child?"

"I've told you all this before, Mr. Trembler," said Pike, quite shocked at the little impression so sad a story had made upon his principal; "she was six years old, and I was seventeen."

"Good gracious!—and you undertook the charge of that brat instead of passing it over to the proper parochial authorities! Why, what will be the consequence of all this, Pike? You'll sink the last years of your life taking care of her?"

"She'll repay my care, sir."

"Yes—with the *own current* in the world, and

taken as payment by the fools who go out of the way to do a good action—by ingratitude.”

“I don’t fear, Mr. Tressider.”

“You’re a man of the world, and ought to know better,” said his employer; “there, proceed to business, and be off to Birmingham as soon as you like—the sooner the better !”

“Thank you, sir.”

Mr. Pike started shortly afterwards; he was going home for a few minutes, he said, before he left the office to the possession of our hero and Radwick. At three in the afternoon Walter Tressider made his appearance, yawning and stretching his arms right and left as he advanced. Approaching our hero’s desk, his handsome face looked over at the work on which Neal was engaged.

“Anything new, Galbraith?”

“A little. Mr. Pike’s gone down to the works at Birmingham.”

“Why the deuce couldn’t I have gone, I wonder?—it’s always Pike who drops in for the change. Well, that was a blessed mess of *Othello* last night, thanks to you, young fellow!”

He looked very gravely at Neal. It was not a

laughing matter with him yet, that anti-climax.

"Miss Webber was wanted at home."

"By her father, I suppose? Yes, I know what a brute that fellow is; but you need not have squelched the scene by your instructions to the servant. It's a mercy Jennings didn't choke him."

"I feel sorry for that blunder—more especially as the play was proceeding so well."

"Did Miss Webber think it was going off well?"

"Yes."

"Thanks to her and me, for the others were horrible sticks. She's clever at histrionics, there's no doubt of that."

"Is she a member of your club?"

"A member under the rose, when she can slip away. It must be hard in a girl of her years to have the reins drawn so tightly."

"Have you known her long?"

"Jennings's sister first introduced me to her. Miss Webber's a nice girl—deuced nice!"

Walter Tressider almost spoke with feeling.

"You are engaged to her, perhaps?" Neal asked bluntly.

"Engaged, my dear fellow!" exclaimed Tren-

sider, after a long pause, and a slight change of colour—"I engaged to be married! Bless your soul, I cannot take anybody for better or worse unless there's a fortune to boot!"

"Why not?"

"And as for getting a sixpence out of old Webber—well, I wish he may get it who tries, that's all. I'm not cut out for the holy state, Galbraith," he said, mounting Mr. Pike's stool as more convenient for conversation, and contriving, by tilting the stool towards the wall, and leaning his elbow on the desk, to fall into a full-length *pose*—"I like my liberty too well—I'm too much of a man of the world, *mon ami*. What could I do with a wife and a hundred and thirty pounds per annum?—make my wife miserable with my very bad way of managing money-matters—kill her and the babies, that would come by dozens, of course, according to established rule in this ill-regulated universe. If I were earning a thousand a-year now, I might think of little Webber; she's capital company, and altogether a good sort—but, as it is, why, Free's the word!"

Walter Tressider, for all this, spoke dismally rather than exultingly; he was in no mood for

work that afternoon—last night's dissipation had disturbed the current of his business ideas, and he would do anything but work, or let Neal work. He was *in* for pure unadulterated conversation. He forgave Neal all his last night's trespasses, and even laughed at them after a while, as Miss Webber had laughed the night before.

"Do you know, Galbraith, that I shall make a convert of you?—that I have resolved to win you over to the good cause? I have a very strong idea that acting is your forte—you have such a capital face for the villain of the tragedy!"

"Thank you for the compliment. But I shall never have the time—my father is not strong, and needs a companion."

"A fellow of your age can't be tied up like that. If I had a father, I wouldn't stand it. The governor that will not make his own amusements, should be voted a nuisance!"

Neal gasped with horror at this irreverent exclamation—he who loved his father so well, could not understand the mind which estimated the parent at so little. And yet Walter Tressider had intended no irreverence—it was his usual careless style of address that had carried him away; he scarcely

remembered *his* father, though he had grieved, as a child, for the loss of him ; but he was a heedless fellow, undisturbed by home-thoughts—a man who had never known a real home of his own, and had only heard of nine commandments. Let us add, also, in this place, that he never exactly meant what he said, as future chapters will prove clearly enough. He stands in this book as a specimen of an indifferent article, not at all scarce in society, and there is a good deal to be said about the man in future pages.

Letters came in pretty thickly by the afternoon post, and were taken to the principal's room. Just as Neal was going home, Mr. Tressider brought a message into the counting-house.

"Here, one of you two fellows, do a little over-work for once, and show your zeal for the house of Tressider. I want this message to be telegraphed to Birmingham from Euston Square."

"For old Pike, I suppose," said Walter, after the principal had retired, taking up the slip of paper and reading it ; "just as I supposed. '*Stay till Wednesday. Send instructions by next post.*' That's a nice order ; and here am I, who ought to be confidential clerk, and my uncle's

right hand, stuck in London in the middle of August!"

"Would business at Birmingham be much of a change?"

"I'd make it change—I like change—I was born for something better than this, *I* know," and the dissatisfied young man gave a kick to his office stool.

"Shall I take that message to Euston Square?" asked Neal.

"It will get there in plenty of time—where's the hurry?" said Walter; "do you want to take it?"

"I have only one objection—and that is, my father will be anxious about me, and wonder where I am."

"Your father turns up every minute, like a bad sixpence—I never knew such a fellow! Here, I'll go. I *was* off in another direction——"

"Then pass the paper over."

"But my course of action doesn't affect society, and yours does. You have a decided wish, I have only the eighth part of a desire—good evening," and away dawdled Walter Tressider, swinging the paper in his hand, and evidently making up his mind to lose it as he went along.

"Well, he's not a bad fellow, after all," said Neal; and he bore young Tressider in kindly remembrance from that day.

The next day, which was Saturday, our hero received a telegram in his turn—"From David Pike, Honesty Works, Birmingham, to Neal Galbraith, Esq., Honesty Wharf, Shad Thames."

The missive ran as follows: "*Go to No. 14, Crow Street, Bethnal Green Road, and tell Addie that I shall not be home till Wednesday.*"

"That's rather cool," said Neal, aggrieved at the peremptory command; "look here, Tressider."

"People don't say please in telegrams—it's expensive courtesy. Fancy working wires hundreds of miles off, in order to say 'please.'"

"But why did he not telegraph to his niece at once?"

"Can't say. Never did understand old Pike. Touched, I fancy."

Neal pondered over Mr. Pike's reasons for some time, and finally arrived at a new conclusion, which, we may add at once, was not far from the truth. Mr. Pike wished the news broken gently to his niece, and had entrusted Neal with that delicate operation.

"He might have picked out one of his own friends," thought Neal; "but I suppose it's complimentary, and that I must not grumble."

Neal started for Bethnal Green Road after office hours; and, to save time, went by a cheap omnibus to Church Street, Shoreditch.

"What a distance for a man to live from office," thought he, as he wended his way towards Bethnal Green, and looked right and left for Crow Street.

He found Crow Street at last, arriving there in somewhat of a bad temper, as the distance impressed itself upon him, and the thought of his father fidgeting about his non-appearance haunted him more and more. He did not always execute commissions as gracefully and generously as last Thursday's, it is evident—and let it be placed on record here, that we have more than once hinted that Neal Galbraith had his "dark hours."

At 14, Crow Street, after anathematizing three number fourteens which had been found in that identical thoroughfare, and the last of which, of course, was the right one, he knocked forcibly and imperatively. It was a small house, one of a small row of houses, possessing three windows in

front, and flowers in the windows. As he waited he heard a light pattering of feet descending the stairs, and then the door was opened, and a dark-skinned girl of fourteen or fifteen, with hair as black as his own, almost darted into his arms.

"Oh! I thought it was Uncle David back from Birmingham," she said, receding very rapidly. "What do you want?"

"I'm a friend of Uncle David's, and have brought a message from him."

"Will you step inside, please?" she asked, demurely, "and let me know your business. It's not bad news?" she added, more suddenly, and looking at him with two widely-distended eyes.

"No. Only business that will keep him at Birmingham until Wednesday."

"Oh! dear, that's bad news enough, sir!"

Neal had followed her into the front parlour—a well-furnished room, overstocked with bookcases overstocked with books, hampered by aquaria, fern-cases, and a huge telescope standing on three legs in the corner of the room. On the table was a well-appointed tea equipage for two, and an urn that bubbled and smoked over it like a presiding genius.

"Your uncle telegraphed to me to-day that I

was to come hither and inform you of his prolonged stay at Birmingham."

Addie sighed.

"Very well, Mr. Galbraith."

"Why, how did you know my name?" exclaimed the surprised Neal.

"I know all about the office," was the reply.

"Uncle David tells me everything concerning the business. You cannot be Mr. Tressider, because you are not old enough, or Mr. Tressider's nephew, because he comes here now and then to see my uncle, and I think that you must be Mr. Radwick or Mr. Galbraith, one of the cross-looking clerks."

"Uncle David says I am cross-looking, then?"

"Stern-looking, that's all—Radwick's the cross one. But—oh! dear, I shall not hear any news till Wednesday now," she said, very sadly, "or see my dear old uncle's face. You like my uncle very much, Mr. Galbraith?"

"Well, I have not seen a great deal of him, at present," said Neal, abashed by this question.

"Ah! you have not been at office long—you will presently. Everybody likes my uncle—why shouldn't you?"

She looked quite fiercely at Neal, who answered:

"Ah! why shouldn't I?"

He was standing at the door, anxious to make good his retreat, but the young lady talked so rapidly that the opportunity had not presented itself yet awhile.

"You are in a hurry, perhaps, to get home to your father," said Miss Merton, suddenly.

"Well, I have a father waiting to take tea with me."

"The father who went to law, and then to ruin. My uncle has told me that story," she added, noticing Neal's start.

"He tells you everything, it seems."

"Oh! yes, he tells me everything—why should he have any secrets from me?" said Miss Merton.

"And I remember that story, because Uncle David was very full of it, year after year. Whenever I caught him at the paper, he was reading Galbraith's case, and following Galbraith's case. It made him ill almost; but that was before you came to London. He keeps all the papers about it in that drawer."

She pointed to a drawer with brass handles, appertaining to an old-fashioned book-case, and

Neal looked at it mechanically, wondering meanwhile what it all meant or foreboded.

"I would not say any more, Miss Merton," said Neal, chivalrously, "or your uncle will think that I have been trying to get at his secrets."

"My uncle never had any secrets, sir. He don't like them. More do I!"

"Well, you will remember not to sit up for your uncle to-night?—good evening!"

"Good evening. I am sorry that you have brought me such bad news, sir. But I must try and not be dull here till he comes back, lonely as it is without him."

"You alone here!"

"I am uncle's housekeeper—we don't keep a servant or want one, even if we could afford it," she added with the same startling frankness. "I'm rather fond of being by myself in the day-time."

"And too much of a woman to be frightened in the night time," said our hero, with a wish to reassure her.

"Frightened indeed! Why, who would hurt me?"

"Nobody."

"Uncle David thinks that I'm old enough to take care of myself—I have the same idea," she added with a pleasant laugh.

"Have you left school?" asked Neal, doubtful of her age.

"I have never been to school. Uncle David is my schoolmaster every night still—but this is my last half. Good evening again."

"Good evening."

Neal Galbraith took his departure, and Addie shut the door after him, and drew across it an iron chain for security's sake.

"A queer girl, with a queer uncle to take care of her," mused Neal; "one meets with some odd people in town."

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. HIGGS GIVES A HINT.

WHEN Mr. Pike returned from business on the Wednesday, he apologized to Neal for the trouble that he had given him.

"She's a girl that bears up well against a disappointment, but I did not like to try her too much with a telegram. She might have fancied that some accident had happened, and—and you did not care about the trouble, I hope?"

"No, sir," answered Neal, not quite truthfully.

"I don't think we ought to mind helping one another when we can," he said. "I dislike people who are disobliging. What did you think of Addie?"

"Think of her!" repeated Neal; "oh! a very self-possessed girl."

"Old-fashioned?" he said quickly.

"Just a little perhaps for her age."

"You're old-fashioned, you know."

"Oh! am I?"

He thought at once of the observation of that young lady, whom he had not seen for nearly a week now—"old-looking boy!"

"I like old-fashioned young people. I was very old-fashioned myself when I was a boy, and that is the reason, perhaps."

"Yes, but in a girl like yours, it's objectionable."

"Why?"

"Oh!—because—it is," stammered Neal, who had not a reason ready to his lips.

"I don't know that—I hope it is *not*," said Mr. Pike. "I like young women grave and thoughtful and reverent."

"I can't say I do at present."

"But—there, there, don't lead me into discussion—I'm getting as bad as young Tressider—where's the cash-book?"

There was not much time for discussion; business was really setting in at the Metal Works—goods were coming from Birmingham to town—there were life and bustle in the place—even Walter Tressider was compelled to keep to his desk, and not idle time away.

This application to business seemed to exercise an injurious effect on the health of Walter Tressider; he became reserved and low-spirited, and some of the bright colour on his cheeks began to fade. Neal ventured to ask if he were well on the Saturday—a week since his visit to Crow Street.

“Right as ninepence, Galbraith,” he answered; “what made you think anything to the contrary?”

“You’re not looking first-rate, I fancy.”

“It’s the hot weather. A fellow ought to be out of town now—a fellow that could afford it, which is not the happy condition of W. T.”

On the evening of that day, Neal had his suspicions that it was something more than the business which dispirited Walter Tressider. Towards five o’clock he found he could not escape the following dialogue between Tressider and Mr. Pike, without leaving his desk.

“I—I can’t lend you much, Tressider,” said Pike. “I have rent and taxes to pay, and a niece to support. You have always had the advantage of me, and should have saved money.”

“I shall save presently. But, as you see, it’s a fix, and if you’re the right sort, you’ll help me out of it.”

"Have you spoken to your uncle?"

"No—nor to the devil, at present. Those two gentlemen are my last resources."

"Don't speak like that," said Pike peevishly; "you know I hate such talk. How much do you want?"

"Twenty pounds."

"I can't do it. I wouldn't," said Pike, very firmly, "lend more than I could afford, for anything."

"Well, how much can you afford, old fellow?—say at fifty per cent. interest."

"I don't want any interest; and I can lend you nine pounds, fifteen."

"Look here!" said Neal, bluntly, "I don't want to intrude upon your private business, but speak less loud, gentlemen, unless you want me to hear."

"Oh! it's no secret," said Tressider. "I often borrow a pound or two of Pike, and I pay him on quarter-day, like an honest man, as I am. I'll borrow of you, when you can afford it, Neal."

"No, you won't," replied Neal, firmly.

"We'll say nine pounds, fifteen," said Walter, languidly; "although it will not do much good.

I'll come round to your place in the evening for it—the only place, after all, that has a dash of home in it! What an unlucky scamp I am, Pike!”

“It's your own fault,” said the other unsparingly. “You never would take advice—you went your own way to work, and never thought of the result. It's a wonder to me that you have any principle left in you.”

“And there *is* a little?”

“Or I wouldn't lend you a penny.”

“I should have been senior clerk here, at your salary, if my uncle had been anything like an uncle,” grumbled Walter Tressider.

“There, there, keep to your work for one year, and then see how your uncle acts.”

“Oh! he don't mind whether I keep to work or not.”

“Don't he?”

“He never says anything.”

“Perhaps he thinks the more,” said Pike; “and really I would,” he added with greater interest—“I *would* give up that silly stage nonsense, and all those silly stage friends of yours. You're clever, and only want energy—you've no will of

your own to keep straight, and work upwards—you make me very unhappy, at times. I've told you so before."

"Why should I make you unhappy?" said Walter. "You're no relation of mine, and I've nothing in common with you. I bore you at home when I've nothing better to do; but I don't even go to your chapel."

"I wish you did."

"And I don't care what becomes of me much—why should *you*?"

"Walter, there's something more upon your mind."

"It'll stay there if there is."

He dropped off his stool, and sauntered into the private room. Mr. Pike looked after him, and shook his head.

"I can't understand him—I shall never be able to make a man of him, let me try as hard as I will!" he muttered; "he won't be a man!"

Neal thought no more of Walter Tressider's eccentricities for several days. There came to him a new thought, or the revival of an old one, and that took him out of the common track.

The next day but one, on the Monday, he saw

Carry Webber again. She arrived at the same moment, as Neal came down the street from business, and they both reached Mrs. Higgs's house at once.

Neal took off his hat in the most approved fashion, and Carry gave him one of her brightest smiles, extending her hand at the same time.

"I hope you are well, Miss Webber?"

"Thank you, very well," she said; "is my aunt within?"

"I believe so. I have just returned from office."

"I have been delivering a business message for my father, and have taken my aunt's house *en route*," she said, with great emphasis on her French, as though she was rather proud of it, and it certainly *was* a rarity in Fife Street. "I have been watching an opportunity to thank my aunt and you, oh! so very much, for all your trouble and kindness!"

"Pray don't thank me!" said Neal, blushing.

"It was not much to do! I hope the result was perfectly successful?"

"Father thought that I had been idling on my errand—that was all. It was a narrow escape

for me," she said, shuddering; "I must sober down now, take this for a warning, and try and like home better."

She was a different Carry Webber that afternoon—more mild and equable, and certainly more pretty, Neal thought.

Mrs. Higgs opened the door, and found niece and lodger together on the door step.

"Lors!—the two on you! How funny it looks!" she said, somewhat irrelevantly.

"I have been thanking Mr. Galbraith for all the trouble of that Richmond night, and I'm going to thank you now for——"

"All the lies!—ah! well you may. I never thought of swearing black was white, before that day; but your father frightened me, Carry, and I haven't been myself since. Come in."

"I can't stop long—father expects me back in an hour. Good evening, Mr. Galbraith."

"Good evening, Miss Webber."

Neal shook hands with her again, and went upstairs to dinner and tea with his father—both meals together, after office hours, and thus a saving of expense. If any one had asked Neal why he hurried through his dinner that day, he would

have been scarcely able to assign a reason. He was at home for the evening, and had but his father to attend to, and his father was in no hurry about anything now. Still in half an hour's time he had finished dinner and was sitting at the open window with his father, detailing the business news at "Hopeful's," and keeping a watch upon the door-step below. In the middle of his story, Mr. Galbraith suddenly produced from his pocket a paper, which he carefully unfolded.

"Do you remember my idea, Neal, for the current of cold air being introduced into the annealing process?—that patent affair?"

"What of it?" asked Neal, staring at the paper in his father's hands.

"You've locked up all the sketches, and I've been trying to remember the idea, that's all. Is that anything like it?"

Neal took the paper from his father's hand, and scowled at it. Yes, it was very like the idea which might have made his father's fortune, and yet had only led them into Fife Street—the plan was carefully, though hastily struck off, and the details were accurate enough. Neal knew them by heart, though he never alluded to them, and that heart

leaped again with joy after gazing at the paper for awhile. His father might have done this a month ago, but he would have been ill—mad—for days afterwards; he saw the evidence of his father's greater strength, and he was glad, though fearful.

"You must not take to this yet," he said; "what did the doctors say?"

"That my head wouldn't stand it—it will now, Neal."

"A little of it, not too much. Half an hour a day—no more. I won't have any more than that, mind."

"Just as you please," said the father, submissively; "it's a very little time to think of anything new, that will take us back to independence. If I could only get stronger, and not be such a clog upon you!"

The old man began to whimper softly to himself; Neal passed his arm through his, and led him upstairs.

"You have almost overdone it, old gentleman," he said; "you have been an hour or two at this fun."

"Not more than a couple of hours, boy."

"Then you must go to bed, and sleep off the worry of it. And if I catch you doing it again

this week, I'll alter my mind about allowing you half an hour a day for study."

"No, don't say that."

Neal put his father to bed, and returned to the drawing-room. Having exerted a show of authority to keep the weak-minded sire submissive still, he returned to pace up and down the room and soliloquize, forgetting Carry Webber underneath.

"He's sure to get well, God bless him!" cried Neal; "it only wanted time and peace, and he shall have them both. I see it all coming round now; and when the upper hand and stronger mind return to keep *me* down, and show me what a poor, insufficient fellow I am, how happy I shall be! I see the end of it, with a bright home for us, and the life so different—the life in the sunshine! Some one to advise me, instead of me advising and shrivelling up with too much thought. Why, I feel as if I had the cares of all the world upon me, and it's only that simple-hearted gentleman to mind, after all."

A hand fell lightly on the panels of his door, and startled him.

"Learn your part well, Mr. Galbraith," said a merry voice without.

Carry Webber, who had been setting her bonnet straight, and studying the proper arrangement of her ringlets in Mrs. Higgs's room, had, on issuing forth, heard Neal's voice in deep soliloquy. Hence the coquettish action of Miss Webber, and Neal brought to the surface again. Impulse took him downstairs with his hat in his hand, to face Mrs. Higgs and Carry in the passage.

"I'm off for a little walk, Mrs. Higgs—father's tired, and gone to bed. I shall not be more than half an hour. You are not going my way, Miss Webber?"

"Not very far your way, Mr. Galbraith;" and then the two went up the street together, and Mrs. Higgs looked anxiously after them.

Neal walked by the side of Miss Webber quite boldly—indeed, when he thought of it afterwards in his own room, he was astonished at his boldness! Possibly he had more confidence than usually falls to the lot of a young man not twenty years of age; but then he had lived and acted a man's part before he had outgrown his youth.

"Mrs. Higgs has forgiven you, I hope?"

"Yes. Aunt is not likely to be very hard upon

me, and although I was never her favourite, I am always sure of a friend in her."

"She's a good woman—I like Mrs. Higgs," said Neal, quite patronizingly.

"And she likes you," said Carry; "and as Mrs. Higgs is a good judge of human nature, you should consider yourself flattered."

"So I do."

"She tells me you are so steady, matter-of-fact, and kind to your father, that I begin to fancy she wants me to imitate your style. Do you give lessons?"

Neal might have resented this satire from any one else—from Carry Webber it was a pleasant friendly sauciness, that made his heart thrill.

"I'll give you as many lessons as you like," he added, "free of all expense, and with thanks into the bargain for the pupil's attention."

"How very kind! I wish I had the time."

"Or inclination!—eh, Miss Webber?"

"Were I sure that I could profit by your lessons, I should have the inclination," she answered, turning from jest into sober interest. "I would give all I have in the world—that's not much—to love my parents, and believe in their love for me!"

I can only learn to sober down now. I have run wild a little, and been false a little, but I shall grow staid and better, *perhaps*."

"Perhaps!"

"I can't be eternally crossed," she answered; "and I'm not a good temper, or truthful, or anything that makes people loved. But then," she added, scornfully, "see how I was brought up!"

"I could not teach you how to be good-tempered," said Neal, striving hard to drift into the lighter channel of conversation again, "for they tell me that I have a very bad temper myself."

"Fond of your own way—I daresay you are. So am I."

She laughed again—the shadows stole away from her face, and a golden light replaced them. This *was* a beautiful evening, thought Neal! He took no heed of time, distance, or locality; he could have walked on for ever talking to Carry Webber; she was a pretty, attractive girl enough, and he was impressionable, and not twenty years of age. All girls should be heroines, and life be dreamland with such youths as Neal. If it had not been dreamland until then with him, he verged upon it that summer evening, and his temples throbbed,

and his heart fluttered with a sense of something that defied analysis.

"I'll bid you good night here," said Carry at last.

"So soon?"

"Why, you have come almost to the door with me, and what you want down all these back streets, I don't know."

"Which is your house?" asked Neal.

"Over there. Isn't my name large enough in black and chrome to see?"

"Where does that street lead, Miss Webber?"

"To the Borough Road——"

"And that to the right?"

"The Causeway, and the Borough."

"It strikes me this must be a near cut to business. I'll try it."

"Mr. Tressider is still at business with you?" asked Carry, carelessly—"my Moor of Venice, whom *you* smothered!"

"Yes. He's not very well—I can't make him out just now. He's generally in very good spirits."

"His spirits are not to be relied upon."

"Don't you like him?"

"I hate him! Good night."

And very hastily Carry bade our hero adieu, and tripped across the road.

Neal walked slowly back from Shepherd Street, a little perplexed at this last assertion of Miss Webber, until the reminiscences of their prior conversation chased the perplexity away. Then he strode briskly forwards with his brisker thoughts, and was soon in Fife Street once more.

Mrs. Higgs was on the watch for him.

"How far did you go with Carry?" asked she.

"Oh! a little way."

"I saw you cross the road—she grows prettier every day, more's the pity."

"Pity, Mrs. Higgs?—good heaven!"

Mrs. Higgs stood with her back to Neal, snuffing her one candle at the table; Neal lingered at the door, anxious to hear a little more concerning Miss Webber.

"I like to see people grow good and 'siderate, and not think so much about theirselves. She's a kind gal when the fit's on her—there's many wus—and she means no harm when she's taken flighty like, as she was that Richmond night—oh! the horrid lies I told her father!—but she isn't the gal

exactly that I'd like any young feller that I 'ticularly 'teemed to take a fancy to!"

She swung round suddenly, snuffers in hand, and faced our hero with her sharp grey eyes. Neal felt that he was colouring, though he had not taken a fancy—not he, indeed!—he had something better to think about!

"Good night, Mrs. Higgs," he blurted forth, beating a retreat, two steps at a time, to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XII.

NEAL'S BIRTHDAY.

HE, Neal Galbraith, take a fancy to Carry Webber! Was it likely?—was it politic in a youth of his age, with the world before him, a father to manage, and eighty pounds a year? Surely he *had* something better to think about than a girl with an oval face, and brown ringlets shot with gold! And if he had not, what a fool he would be to shape a trouble from it all—for only trouble could come of *that* delusion!

Still he went to business Shepherd Street way. It was a near cut to office, time was money, and if the business of Webber, Carriage Breaker, lay in his route, he could not help that, or go round by back-slums to avoid it! He did not walk deliberately into temptation, for he would not acknowledge to himself the spell of any attraction—it was pleasant not to acknowledge any-

thing, and go on blindly believing in that strength of mind of which he was a little vain. And, at the worst, that strength of mind, he thought, could always level a folly to earth, and leave him free to walk on the ruins. So he went Shepherd-Street route to business, and passed Carry Webber's house twice a day, at least.

After awhile he was rewarded by a sight of her at the parlour window—at right angles somewhat, for he could never obtain a full view, owing to a drop-sical, yellow-bodied carriage, planted in the front garden, in company with a barouche, twenty-four wheels, and the body of a Hansom cab. Almost every morning after awhile, at half-past eight, at the parlour window, to return by a smile the courteous elevation of his hat—he had been practising the art of taking his hat off, before the little cracked glass in his bed-room—almost every evening, at half-past five, at the upper window, to smile at him again, and send him home delirious with satisfaction. We say almost every evening, for Carry Webber sometimes kept in the shadow of the room, to enjoy his sad stare upwards, and once to laugh at his discomfiture after he had politely saluted, by mistake, the

grim visage of the mother, glowering over the parlour-blind at the barouche.

Neal found no chance of further conversation with Caroline Webber for a week or two; once he was grievously disappointed to hear that Carry had been at Fife Street in his absence, and had only just departed—a fact which accounted for her non-appearance at the top window that night. He had made a *detour* to the left for the first time, to purchase some tracing-paper for his father, and he felt that he should hate the sight of tracing-paper for the rest of his life.

For the rest of one of his lives; for he was leading two lives just then; his business one, and that little romantic existence with which business had no connection, and in which he scarcely dreamed he was living himself. It was all right, he felt assured—he knew what he was about—he was a young man, or an “old-looking boy,” wise in his generation.

He kept at his post in that business which had periodical attacks of liveliness, pleasing his master and his senior clerk. He worked well, too well, for his years; he only regretted that there was so little to do at times, and that he could not get

rid of his doubts that it was altogether a shabby, struggling business. There was little stirring, take the month through, but he should solve the mystery some day.

Meanwhile, the autumn months came round, and he reached the mature age of twenty years. Mr. Galbraith apprised him of the fact, and offered to him another assurance that all was going well with the father.

"Many happy returns of the day, Neal, and God bless you for a good son!" said the old gentleman, coming into Neal's room to embrace him on that occasion.

"Why, he do look five-and-twenty, at least!—and with whiskers too!—I never saw such a lad to grow old!"

Mrs. Higgs might have said that in the latter days with equal propriety.

That was a memorable birthday for Neal Galbraith. He met Carry Webber at her aunt's house again, when his father and he had condescended to take tea with Mrs. Higgs, in consideration of the importance of the occasion. Could ever anything have happened more lucky in the world for him? thought Neal.

For Carry Webber sat down to have tea with them after a little pressing, and Neal found a chair for her by his side, and all was as it has been in your time and mine, reader—in the merry, merry days, etc. Neal scarcely cared to believe in the reality of his sensations even then; he was conscious that it was pleasant, more than pleasant, to sit by Carry Webber's side and talk to her, and hear her musical voice in reply.

She offered her congratulations like an old friend, too, when informed of the especial nature of the feast, and Neal blushed whilst he thanked her, and, for a moment pressed that little hand which she had frankly tendered him, when offering her best wishes. It was the first evening that he had spent with her—and he found, as he had expected, that she improved rapidly upon acquaintance. She was very charming that night, to the heated imagination of a boy of twenty, and she knew how to be charming when it pleased her! Neal could not realize her petulance on that afternoon, in the same parlour, when he had gone downstairs to console her, or her variable wilfulness—he would not say slyness—that had characterized the Richmond night, and made him just a little doubtful of her

disposition. Those days might lie years back for what he knew to the contrary—she was a girl then, now she was a sober woman!

Neal never knew how that evening passed, but it was time for Carry to return home, before he thought the tea-things had been cleared away more than five minutes. The days “draw in” very much at the end of October; the night had fallen long since, and the gas-lights had been shimmering in Fife Street for two hours, when Carry rose to go.

Neal suggested that he would escort her to her father's house—that it was very late for a young lady to go home alone; and what could Mrs. Higgs say to all this, but that Neal, being a gentleman born, knew best what was genteel and becoming. But she shook her head after the young couple had gone—and took another opportunity of retiring into the passage to shake it unperceived by the old gentleman.

Meanwhile, Neal was Carry's escort home, and Carry's hand was on his arm. Fife Street and the back “slums” leading to Shepherd Street were strewn with roses that night—a path that led Paradise way, Neal felt assured—and yet there was no “love-talk” between them. Neal had not the cour-

age to talk sentiment, even if he had been impressed with the belief of "a chance" for him. He verged once on the romantic, when she asked him, perhaps a little archly, if he found Shepherd Street a quicker route to business.

"A very pleasant route when the sun shines, Miss Webber," he said.

"But when it rains?" was the innocent answer.

"The sun shines even when it rains in Shepherd Street!"

And then Carry was silent, thinking perhaps that Master Neal might go a little too far with his compliments.

Neal had done his best, however, and of his own free will he changed the conversation.

"Have you seen your friend, Miss Jennings, lately?"

"Oh! no; I never expect to see her any more."

"How is that?"

"The Jennings are not in my station of life—although Emily and I were schoolfellows together—they keep a carriage, and my father gets a living by breaking carriages and selling the bits."

"I thought that you were a great friend of Miss Jennings."

"I have no great friends—I'm not allowed any, because it leads to company keeping and extravagance. But Emily never was a great friend of mine—she thought that I should be useful at her private theatricals, because she knew that I had just a little talent that way, and that there was no one to play *Desdemona*, who would not have murdered the part. So I came in handy, Mr. Galbraith."

"What a shame! and you risked your father's displeasure to oblige a girl like that!"

"No—to please myself and show off! I'm fond of showing off at times, and it was quite like a story-book to do all this so quietly, and nobody ever the wiser."

"Your father was nearly the wiser for it."

"Very nearly. What fun it was!—what a race home—I often think of it."

"Ah! so do I!"

And then they were close upon Miss Webber's house, and Neal could have wished that fifty miles had lain between it and Fife Street. But the events of that night were not yet over—we have said that it was a memorable night for Neal Galbraith.

In Shepherd Street, Walter Tressider met them

face to face. Both started to see this man, haggard and pale as neither perhaps had seen him yet.

"Hollo! Galbraith, I did not expect to meet you!" he said somewhat rudely; then turning to his companion, "Miss Webber, I have been waiting here these last two hours, to say a few words before I go away."

"Go away!—where?—what do you mean?"

"I'll explain in a very few words—Mr. Galbraith will bid you good night now."

"Good night, Mr. Galbraith—thank you for your escort."

Our heroes shook hands, looking, somewhat stupidly for a hero, from one to the other, then raised his hat, and beat a retreat. Tressider was after him in an instant.

"Stay here a minute, old fellow!" said he, almost entreatingly; "I have something to say to you, too. Will you wait here for me a little while?—do you mind?"

"No—I don't mind," said Neal, halting abruptly against a lamp-post. He was inclined to feel aggrieved now, and he answered somewhat sulkily.

Walter Tressider hurried back to Miss Webber. She was standing under the next lamp-post, a com-

panion figure of isolation, till Tressider joined her. Neal had not the courage to turn his back upon them; he wanted to closely observe matters, and if they had wished him not to see them, they would have gone round the corner of the next street out of visual range. So Neal stood with his arms folded, glowering at the couple from beneath the rim of his hat. It was an animated conversation between them; Tressider was evidently energetic, Neal could see his arms rising and then falling to his side, and Carry's face betraying some emotion in the full light of the gas-lamp above it—more than emotion, for she drew her handkerchief from her pocket at last, and wiped her eyes. They had evidently forgotten him, or they would have gone round the corner, and not have wrung his heart so; he turned his back upon them at last, and waited patiently Walter Tressider's pleasure—he had had the feelings of a gentleman, and he felt now uncommonly like a spy.

Five minutes, ten minutes, there—Walter Tressider must have forgotten him and gone away! He looked round for an instant; no, they were still talking there, earnestly, perhaps, but without gesticulation. Right about face once more, and

pondering in his mind the advisability of going home, when Tressider joined him.

"I have kept you waiting a precious time, Galbraith," he said, in a very hoarse voice.

"Oh!—are you ready?"

They went on together in silence for awhile, Tressider not inclined to commence the conversation, Neal resolved not.

Tressider spoke at last, and in a less husky tone.

"I often think that 'To be, or not to be,' of *Hamlet*, the grandest soliloquy in all the languages of the world; but I never thought to realize *Hamlet's* condition of mind."

"You! I should think not."

"Upon my soul, if it were not for the 'afterwards,' I should not flinch at the bare bodkin!"

"Oh! yes, you would, when you came to the practical *point* of it," said Neal, now wondrously matter-of-fact and satirical.

"If that's a joke, Galbraith, it's particularly unseasonable," said Tressider, in an offended tone.

"What's the matter? What do you want with me?"

"To bid you good-bye, old fellow! I have had a row with my uncle, and I'm off to the provinces, to try the stage ranting dodge in real earnest."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"The fact is, Galbraith, I must make a bolt of it. My creditors will not stand any more nonsense, and are determined to lock me up in default of cash payments. I have been a little extravagant—I can't pay them—and I decline, under any consideration, to be locked up. I have made a clean breast of it to my uncle, and he will not help me, or he can't help me—for it's my belief that he's as poor as a church mouse."

"You think so!—why, so do I!" cried Neal.

"Perhaps he can't tell himself, till he winds up his accounts—it's more than likely—at all events, he'll not put himself out of the way to help *me*, and, for the matter of that, I never expected him. So I am off to-morrow, Galbraith, to try my fortunes in another field, and live or die in the venture."

"You seem inclined to die beforehand," said Neal.

"Well, I'm horribly miserable—I haven't much hope. I do not know that I ever fancied that I should make a great name on the stage—stage struck as I have been. I understand the uphill nature of my profession, and I don't regard the future cheerfully."

"What does Miss Webber think?" tartly inquired Neal, as they crossed the St. George's Road into Fife Street."

"Oh! Miss Webber!" he paused a moment before he went on; "why, she thinks it's better to run than to be locked up. And she is one of the few friends I care to say good-bye to. I have been to Pike, and I was coming on to Fife Street after you."

"I'm very glad you did not!" said the alarmed Neal; "the announcement of your name might have been the death of my father!"

"Why?"

"We need not explain that matter just now," said Neal. "Let me repeat the question that I put to you once before. Are you engaged to Miss Webber?"

"No," he said very slowly and distinctly; "I—am not!"

"You are attached to her? What is the object of being ashamed of it? If such a girl loved me, I should be proud of her affection."

"We are only friends—nothing more. We shall never be more than friends," said Tressider gloomily. "There was a flirtation between us

perhaps, during the getting up of 'Othello,' and some little fun about her various ways of eluding her father, and coming to rehearsals in the City. If I had been better off, I should have married her; but I cannot entangle her in an engagement with a fellow whose ruin is staring him in the face. No, I cannot do that!"

"That's fair and generous, Tressider."

"So, if you have any intentions in that quarter," he said bitterly, "follow them, for me! I am out of the way, the rival with cloak and rapier to fight you to the death for her smiles! She was a friend—she knew my circumstances—her father is a director of a loan office, amongst other things, and breaks up prospects with his weight of interest, as well as carriages with his hammer; although I believe he don't use hammers in his trade," he added, with a short laugh; "but it was a neat comparison. So, as a friend, who knew my affairs and felt for them too, I went to bid her good-bye. She's not tied to me in any way—not likely!"

Neal felt relieved by this open confession; this man was simply, and very naturally, an admirer of Miss Webber—not a lover.

"And now," said Tressider, as they walked down Fife Street, "confession for confession—question for question, Galbraith. Are *you* attached to Miss Webber?"

"I am twenty years of age, and with eighty pounds a year salary," was the terse answer.

"Eighty pounds clear of all incumbrances; I wish that luck were mine. Do you consider that sufficient answer to my question?"

"Well," said Neal more firmly, "I'm in that state of mind that makes Miss Webber's company very pleasant to me; and if I were older, and had more money, and thought that there *was* a chance, I would ask her to be my wife."

"She's a good girl, but she's being spoiled at home," said he moodily; "and perhaps she had better wed eighty pounds a year, and live almost in poverty for a year or two, than be worried to death by those two devils in Shepherd Street!"

"I would never ask a girl to take me and poverty together," said Neal, proudly.

"Ah! and she mightn't care for poverty with *you*, hard as her life is!" was the somewhat uncomplimentary reply. "She's too young to marry, and I don't suppose she cares more for you

than for—me, or anyone else. And this is wofully away from the purpose, Galbraith.”

They reached the blank wall at the end of the street, and turned and retraced their steps.

“That is my house,” said Neal, as they passed it; “if you feel inclined to step in, I must give you a false name to begin with.”

“My false name begins in the provinces, not before; and I haven’t much time to spare for further talk with you. I wonder why I have been so unlucky?—I’m not a bad fellow!”

“No,” said Neal, feeling more sympathetic, now he felt assured that his companion was not “attached” to anyone!

“I have made a few debts, and they have doubled themselves by the cursed laws in force at loan offices; and that is the crime against me. I would have done my best, if I had had a chance—and yet, lacking a fair chance, I haven’t done my worst!”

“That’s well.”

“I have made no man my enemy, and I believe that I have a friend or two. I have never committed a bad action, or wronged man or woman. If I ever get rich, my first step will be to come

back here, and pay every farthing that I owe. Old Pike's nine pounds fifteen, first, because he was a trump, and knew how deep I was in the mud! How they'll worry him about my whereabouts!—those amiable, rapacious creditors!—and I shall be beyond their grip, working my way upwards—or downwards!"

Galbraith could sympathize now with his fellow-clerk, cutting himself adrift from old ties, and going away upon so uncertain and fallacious a project. Neal was an observer, and noted the recklessness with which Tressider set out, buoyed by no future hopes, and strengthened by no past success. Behind him nothing but failure, and dead leaves!—before him the steep ascent, where so many more clever than he had broken their hearts in the effort to ascend—failing, seven-eighths of them.

"You'll wish me luck, Galbraith?" he said when they stood at the corner of the street.

"With all my heart."

"There's one thing I shake hands with myself concerning."

"I don't understand."

"I am thankful that you and I were never great friends, and that you did not 'take' to me," he ex-

plained; "you did not fancy me, and would have none of my temptations. All the better, Neal, for you *might* have copied my failings, and begun to run an account somewhere; and then the accursed grind, grind of the screw—and peace of mind but a mask, which you put on in society. There's a first-rate moral for you!—good-bye."

"Good-bye, Tressider; good luck to you again."

"Amen. And good luck to you, Galbraith—a place in the world, and as clever a name as your father's, without your father's ill-luck—there, that's all the harm I wish you!"

He wrung Neal's hand in his own, and so they parted.

When they met again, the world had altered with them both, and was to alter still more, changing both of them marvellously. But this is a world of change—only beyond it is Immutability.

B O O K II.

A STRANGE COURTSHIP.

CHAPTER I.

“A HAPPY NEW YEAR!”

MR. WALTER TRESSIDER'S place in his uncle's firm was not filled up, another bad sign of dearth of business, Shad Thames way. And yet there were signs from which to augur differently; one came to our hero on the first of January in the new year, when his services were four months old.

In those four months his father had encountered no relapse, and he had met Carry Webber once or twice, fancying on the first occasion that there was a little difference, a new reserve in her demeanour towards him; and on the second fancying that he must have fancied it before! In all weathers, sunshine or storm, proceeding Shepherd Street way to business, seeing her not so often at the windows, and noting on the “lucky days” that her smiles grew somewhat graver as she grew more

womanly and thoughtful. She was eighteen years of age then, a period when feminine flightiness should subside a little.

On that first of January, then, came signs of Mr. Tressider's house not being so unstable as Neal Galbraith had imagined.

"Mr. Tressider wishes to speak to you in his room, Neal," said David Pike, after returning from a conference in that room himself.

Mr. Pike always called our hero by his Christian name now.

"Anything wrong?" asked Neal.

"Go and see," said Pike in reply.

Neal walked to the sanctum of his employer, knocked, and was desired to enter. He found Mr. Tressider smothered in papers and plans, and almost hiding himself behind them, in fact. Neal took the chair indicated, and awaited his employer's pleasure.

"I find that you have been here upwards of four months, doing your work well, considering your youth, inexperience, and want of business habits."

"Considering all these things, sir," said Neal, quite mournfully.

"And I incline to the belief that you are not

here in the capacity of the Avenger," he added; "if you remember, I had my doubts on that subject when you first applied for a situation here—you might have been reading novels too much, and addled your head in consequence. Even in real life we may meet with an Avenger sometimes."

"It is possible, perhaps; I don't know much about Avengers," said Neal carelessly.

"And the Avenger may be of the neuter gender—neither fish, flesh nor fowl—a run of ill-luck sent by the fates, *par exemple*."

He drummed his long fingers on the table, and looked down, till our hero could see nothing of him but a fringe of iron-grey hair. He remained so long silent, that Neal said,

"Have you any commands for me, Mr. Tres-sider?"

"Are you in a hurry?" was the dry rejoinder.

"No, sir," said Neal.

"I was deep in figures when you roused me, and now I shall have to begin the account all over again. I was thinking," he said, speaking very slowly and distinctly, "whether it was worth my while to keep you any longer."

Neal did not answer, although his heart sank

somewhat. His footing was not secure in the world yet, "places" might be hard to find—and there was his charge—his father! Mr. Tressider was meditating a still further decrease in his staff, then, and there was to follow his abrupt dismissal, as Radwick and Walter Tressider had been dismissed before him. But he would not betray his emotion, and therein Neal proved himself to possess one heroic quality. He was conscious of the keen eyes just above the level of the papers heaped on the table, and he sat there very stern and impenetrable, the lad whom we have seen once or twice before in this book.

"And I find," added Mr. Tressider, "that it *is* worth my while, and that you're a very decent specimen—for one of your set! We have been short of hands, you have done my scamp of a nephew's work as well as your own, and I shall save by you—making money out of the son, as I have out of the father!"

"Sir!"

Neal flashed up at this. This was a taunt at his father's ruin—an expression of satisfaction at the manner by which that ruin had been accomplished. To be brought to indigence by a plagi-

arism was hard, but to submit afterwards to the satisfaction of the plagiarist, was an insult that burned into the heart.

"Don't lose your temper, Mr. Galbraith," adjured the other; "under any circumstances it's bad policy. Injured innocence loses half its charms when it assumes the airs of a virago, and the world has no sympathy with red-faced people! In the right, or the wrong, keep your temper, and you will, in nine cases out of ten, get the better of your adversary. I apologize for bringing your father's name into conversation—it was not gracefully done."

Neal bowed. He accepted the apology of his employer, and waited his further remarks.

"I shall save by you, then," he continued, "and therefore I shall not fill Walter's place. But, saving man as I am, I must make it worth your while to stop, as well as worth my while to keep you. What increase of salary do you expect?"

"I have not thought of any increase yet awhile, sir."

"You are doing double duty, or nearly so. Pike grumbles for an increase of wage, and gets it, as

usual. Shall we reward your greater modesty by giving you half as much again, considering that you're twice as useful as I ever thought you would be?"

"Thank you sir," said Neal, feeling more pleased than he even thought the circumstances warranted, for was he not only indirectly receiving back his father's money?

"We will say one hundred and twenty pounds per annum, until further notice, then. I have been talking with Pike about you, and, young as you are, he considers you worth it; and, to tell you the plain truth—which is another bad habit, if you aim at success, remember!—he grumbled for you as well as for himself, and here's the consequences. Don't let me detain you from business any longer, Mr. Galbraith."

Neal rose to withdraw. He was retiring, when Mr. Tressider said:

"Have you heard from Walter lately?"

"No, sir."

"He's not fond of writing, and probably it is as well that he should wrap himself in mystery for awhile. It is a lucky thing that his troubles are not mine, and therefore affect me not. Good

Gad ! if he had been my son, now ! Do you miss him ?”

“Somewhat, sir.”

“He was a pleasant young fellow enough, beset with one foolish idea, that made business monotonous, and an earnest prosecution thereof hard to attempt. I give him credit for making the attempt, however, and failing ; and he gave me credit for being so interested in him, as to sink my substance to pay for his indiscretions. He would have actually bothered me with *his* troubles, if I had not told him that they were an obtrusion, and a nuisance.”

“He may succeed in his new venture, sir. Some one must succeed, even in that profession.”

“Did you ever see him perform ?”

“No, sir.”

“Ah ! I thought not. I remember that I offended him once, when he asked for my candid opinion of his style. I was a terrible play-goer in my young days, and vain of my critical judgment. My nephew persuaded me to see him personate *Romeo*, for a charity, and, by Jove ! it was a charity to form an audience to witness his contortions. ‘My candid opinion is, Walter, that

you're worthy of the A.A. degree,' I said; 'for a more Ambitious Ass I have never seen in my life!' And yet, after asking for my candid opinion, he actually demurred to it, and would have taken offence at it, had he been an ill-tempered man—which he never was; I *will* say that for him."

"We may hear a good report of him yet, sir."

"Not we. He's a spoiled man. His mother spoiled him in his youth, poor fool, by giving him his own way too much. What right have people to spoil their children, and make pests or parasites of them? I never was spoiled!"

Mr. Tressider took up his pen and began writing rapidly; Neal went back to the counting-house, and to Mr. Pike's desk.

"I have to thank you for suggesting to Mr. Tressider an increase in my salary, Mr. Pike."

"Time you had it—you were doing man's work, Neal," he said; "and I should like to see the Galbraiths rise in the world. What has he given you?"

"Forty pounds more, per annum."

"Well, that's not illiberal," said Pike; "and he never was an illiberal man, for that matter. An irreverent, worldly, bitter-tongued man, but not

illiberal. You don't respect him much, Neal?"

"N—no," said Neal, after an instant's hesitation; "how can I?"

"You bear him malice in your heart still?—I wouldn't do that," said Pike.

"I bear him no malice," said Neal, more frankly; "he has done harm to me and mine, but I think that he is sorry for it himself. And, it's very odd, that I feel sometimes as if I respected him more than he deserved."

"I am glad to hear that. I respect him, though I do not screen his faults, or mind telling him what they are; but then I was office-boy here thirteen years ago, and have become part of the place. He insults me very much sometimes about my tracts—as if tract-distributing were not one of the finest means of conversion."

"But you don't give Mr. Tressider tracts?"

"Yes, I do. For I should like to see him a better man; and when I drop upon a tract that appears to me exactly applicable to his state, I leave it on his desk."

"And he objects?"

"Oh! he calls me dreadful names," said this simple-minded man; "you would scarcely believe

in the cool, insolent manner, which he adopts occasionally. I have been nearly leaving here half-a-dozen times, but I don't know what he would do without me."

This was a naive conceit, that did not set ill on Mr. Pike, for he was not aware that he was conceited. He had spoken only the plain truth, to which Mr. Tressider had recently objected.

"And I don't care about new places, and new faces—I'm not fond of change. I would rather that you and I worked a little harder here, than have another clerk, now Walter's gone."

"We shall not work very hard to keep matters straight, Mr. Pike."

"You may not, perhaps."

Mr. Pike seemed to decline further conversation after this; and Neal mounted his office stool and went to work for the day. But Neal had scarcely entered a figure in the ledger before him, when Mr. Pike said:

"What did you mean just now?"

"I had no hidden meaning, sir."

"Don't you think the firm is busy, or thriving?"

"Not very busy, certainly."

"You must take the year round—not four months of it. Wait a bit."

Neal had resolved not to judge hastily, although appearances were against a favourable judgment as to the commercial standing of the "house." Had not Walter Tressider given it as his opinion that "matters" were not exactly straight?—he, Neal Galbraith, was not alone in his suspicion. To Neal, already, the firm of Tressider appeared making an effort to stand, fighting hard for contracts that did not always turn out profitable, and doing but little in the wholesale line. Now and then a ship-load of things went abroad, and there was bustle for a day or two; but for weeks there was stagnation; and though Mr. Tressider was ever the same, in stagnant days, Mr. Pike was dull. Add to this, mysterious visitors calling on Mr. Tressider, and being closeted with him for hours, and one or two travellers on commission returning with few orders, and there was certainly fair ground for doubt.

Still Mr. Pike spoke confidently, and Neal was not naturally suspicious. He could believe in the quiet method of making money, and he could not imagine Mr. Tressider increasing the salaries of

himself and Pike, if money difficulties were standing in the way. And then the salaries were paid promptly, and Mr. Tressider did not look an anxious man.

"A hundred and twenty pounds a year," said Neal, later in the day—"why, that's quite a man's salary now, Mr. Pike. How comfortable my father and I will be now!"

"He has a small income of his own still?"

"A small one."

"You should buy a house presently, and save paying rent. Pay some money down, and let the rest remain on mortgage."

"And if I lose my place, and am unable to settle the balance?"

"You will never earn less than a hundred and twenty pounds per annum, and will probably earn more. You're clever—your father benefited the metal trade, and the son is always sure of a situation somewhere or other."

"You really think so?"

"I really am sure so, Neal."

Neal could not account for Mr. Pike's expression of confidence, but he believed it nevertheless, and felt happier for the assurance given him. Sure of

one hundred and twenty pounds per annum as a minimum salary—that, with his father's income, made up a hundred and seventy pounds—quite a fortune! A salary upon which many men had to live, and keep large families, and did it, too, without falling into debt. Why not, if they were humble-minded people, who made no display, and were contented with life's necessities? He could marry and live happily on a hundred and twenty pounds a-year, he felt assured; and if he only knew the right girl to love, and who would have him, and put up with his father, he would marry to-morrow. Ah! if he only knew the girl who could take a fancy to Neal Galbraith! He knew the girl—he owned it then to himself—to whom *he* could take a fancy, but that was quite another thing altogether.

Strange it seemed to be idling over his account-books, and thinking, at twenty years of age, of marriage, and taking in marriage; but then he was a youth old in thought, and had only met with one maiden pretty enough to bewilder him, and render the life he had begun early less prosaic. And that girl was not happy in her own home, and was treated harshly—why should not he rescue her, if he were fond of her, however young his

years might be? There had been early marriages before—very early marriages—and people had laughed at the young fools, and said they ought to have known better, and that they would repent of their precipitancy; but nothing came of such prophecies, the young fools became old fools in due course, and people forgot their story, and became interested in something more sensational.

But all this was mere day-dreaming—the fancy pictures of a brain a trifle disturbed by a sudden rise in the world; it could come to nothing, and it was the fault of a slack day that had given rise to such maunderings. Still it was pleasant to think that he was in a position to marry, better off than most “young men” of his age, and that Carry Webber stood only apart from him by her own disinclination. And he was not so sure of that, he thought, with a thrilling heart, for she was friendly in her manner, and not sparing of her smiles. He might have been crossed in love by Walter Tresider, and yet he should have had his chance too, for Carry had once told him that she hated Tresider!—a strong term; but then she was an eccentric girl, and did not study fine words.

What a task for him to model her mind anew,

and win her heart in that home where love should ever exist for her! Why, surely his father and he were preferable to Mr. and Mrs. Webber—and then all the love into the bargain!

Later in the day still, Neal dashed down his own hopes remorselessly. He had but seen Miss Webber a few times; he had no right to think of her; it was not likely that she would ever think of him. Why, she had called him “an old-looking boy,” and that was emphatic evidence of *her* opinion—what nonsense to trouble his head about all this! Let him be content with his rise in life, and keep to his father, Mrs. Higgs and Fife Street, until the world was brighter with him. He went home full of his new thoughts, and even looked up at the carriage-breaker’s windows with a woful countenance—more especially as there was no Miss Webber to raise his hat to that evening.

No Miss Webber!—for a reason that was apparent after a while, and before he was a dozen yards from the house. Marching homewards, with his face none the less gloomy for this little disappointment in life, a hand touched his shoulder somewhat smartly, and even heavily. Neal coloured and stopped, half thinking that it was an unusual

instance of high spirits on Miss Webber's part, and yet half doubting that so heavy a fist could possibly appertain to so sylph-like a being. He turned, and confronted a short, wooden-headed, dirty-faced man, who, with his hat firmly wedged upon his head, seemed waiting for a furious gale in Shepherd Street.

"May I inquire your name, sir? Is it too great a liberty, or will you oblige me?"

The questions were not put too courteously, but jerked out in a gruff voice, that Neal recognized, though he had only heard it once in life. This was, doubtless, Mr. Webber.

"My name is Galbraith, sir."

"And *my* name is Webber. And now, what the devil's your little game?"

"My little game, sir!" said Neal, not ignoring Mr. Webber's slang in that polite and cutting manner with which some people effectually extinguish their slangy acquaintances; "I haven't a little game."

"Not on here? Before my house, doing the awfully polite, taking your hat off to my daughter! 'Pon my soul, I thought it was to Mrs. Webber at first!"

"I can assure you, sir, that it was not."

Neal was very polite, blind to the offensive demeanour of his companion, and returning meekness for brusqueness ; this gentleman with his hands in his pockets might be his father-in-law some day, and, at all events, unpleasant reminiscences should not be on the side of the junior.

"Well?"

Mr. Webber wanted his answer, and seemed even in rather a hurry for it.

"I have had the pleasure of meeting Miss Webber at her aunt's house, once or twice. Passing here on my way to business, I have certainly considered it an act of courtesy to raise my hat to Miss Webber, when accident has placed her at the window."

"You and your father lodge at Mrs. Higgs's?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then it was you or your father who threw a lump of bread at me one night. I daresay it was you, if the truth was known—fellows of your age are always impudent enough."

"The bread must have fallen out of window, sir ; neither my father nor I am capable of such rudeness."

"Ah!" said he doubtfully; "now, just hark here! You need not come this way to business any more—there are plenty of streets that'll take you into the Borough without coming our way; I don't want my girl's head turned with your politeness, and it worries Mrs. Webber and me to see you smirking and bobbing about here twice a-day. I thought I'd mention it."

"Oh! very well, sir—very well. If it gives you offence, of course——"

"Of course you'll do it all the more," he interrupted; "but I may as well tell you, that Carry is not likely to be at the window about your time, and you can save yourself the trouble of passing. Don't forget."

And with a knowing nod at Neal, Mr. Webber stumped across the road.

Neal went onwards again, with his ears tingling and his face burning. He had eaten very humble pie—he, a Galbraith, to swallow this man's coarseness, and not send him back one sharp rejoinder for his insolence! He was mortified at the repulse, and made no allowance for a father's feelings; and a father may be justly aggrieved at young men with whom they are not on "speaking terms," bowing

and scraping to their daughters. And perhaps Mr. Webber *was* justly aggrieved—knowing little of Neal, and having his own ideas of propriety. Still Neal was none the less mortified—mortified with himself, because he had looked like a fool before Mr. Webber—by George! he was sure that he had stood like one “struck silly” before him!

He forgot all about his rise in salary till supper time, thinking of Mr. Webber and what a nice man he *wás*; then he shook off his sense of disgrace, and offered the good news to his father, who had been watching him somewhat wistfully.

“My dear Neal, I congratulate you. It’s a wonderful leap in a salary, and quite out of the common! That makes a hundred and twenty pounds a year, Neal!”

“Yes—it’s very good. I knew you would be pleased, sir.”

“It’s—it’s rather exciting,” said he, passing his hand a little vacantly across his forehead; “because, you see, I wasn’t prepared for it. But it’s better than telling me by bits, and letting the thing drag on for months—a hundred and twenty pounds a-year, Neal!”

“It sounds imposing, sir!”

"We must tell Mrs. Higgs—and we'll drink Mr. Hopeful's health in our supper beer to-night. Meanwhile, Neal, I want your opinion of another plan of mine—I have been working at it quietly for weeks—I haven't been a bit excited over it; upon my word, I have left off with a head-piece as clear as yours!"

"Because you left off in good time—why, you wouldn't keep at work longer than an hour a day, and break your promise to me?"

"Not for the world, boy!"

"Let us have a turn at the plan, then."

Mr. Galbraith produced it, and even attempted to explain it, till his son said that he understood it without his explanation, and sat with his thoughtful eyes directed to the diagram. Neal, in younger days, had evinced a certain leaning of the mind towards his father's pursuits, which leaning had been encouraged before the shock came. After the shock, all uphill studies had appeared fallacious to Neal, whose common sense assured him what was best to follow in emergency. But he understood and appreciated clever ideas, when associated with their practical working. He was clever enough to see when they were thoroughly

impracticable, and where the flaw was. And in his father's latter-day sketches there was always a flaw—a hitch in the machinery, that kept the wheels from revolving. Neal was prudent, and never called attention to these defects; he expressed his satisfaction at his father's plans—always containing more than a glimmering of sense—and then proposed putting them away in the portfolio, till they had capital enough between them to work out the scheme. And once in the portfolio was to shut them for ever from the memory of Galbraith the Inventor.

This new sketch varied but little from its predecessors, and Neal expressed his verdict thereon, and considered it worth thinking about some day or other.

Mrs. Higgs, entering with the supper tray, afforded a diversion, and Neal told her the news, like a free-spoken youth with his heart full. Mrs. Higgs gave vent to her satisfaction, wished Neal every enjoyment with his money, and expressed it as her opinion, that it was a blessing sent to Neal for being a good son.

“Oh! don't tell me that, Mrs. Higgs, or you'll make me think myself better than other people,” cried our hero.

"Lors! the sight of news that there's been to gally me to-day, take it in the lump!" said Mrs. Higgs; "here are you going to be a rich man, and my niece Carry with a chance of marrying 'pectably—only think!"

"What's that?" asked Neal, with a suspicious sharpness.

"I made a call to-day at Johannah's—I don't like to be always away, as if she wasn't my sister quite—though we seldom agree when we do meet, and yet it's flesh and blood of one sort, you see."

"Yes—yes, I see; and Miss Webber is likely to be married, then?"

"I didn't say that," said Mrs. Higgs; "she can if she likes—there'll be a hoffer in a day or two; and young as she is, I shouldn't be sorry to see her marry some middle-aged tradesman or other, a man that could hold her pretty tight in hand, without her knowing it."

Mrs Higgs looked hard at Neal, and spoke with great distinctness, but Neal was on his guard after that.

"And who's the happy man?—shall we drink his health in our supper beer, along with Mr. Hopeful's?"

"He's a friend of Mr. Webber, if Webber has any—I never heard of his having any afore—but Johannah calls him a friend, and I think he's a pork-butcher, with a widdered family of nine."

"A pork-butcher? Oh! good heavens!" Neal could not help exclaiming; "what next?"

"Johannah thinks it's a good match—he has two shops—one in Lambeth Walk, and one in 'Pital-fields. What can the trade matter, if he makes her happy, Master Neal?"

Neal on guard again.

"'A man's a man for a' that,'" sang Neal. "To be sure, 'what's the odds?' as you elegantly express it."

"I never said nothing about odds," affirmed Mrs. Higgs.

"I beg your pardon—I was thinking of a wise old aphorism."

"What's any ism got to do with Carry?"

"Nothing. Carry'll be happy with the pork-butcher, and help to stuff the sausages, and we'll deal with her lord and husband, and so increase the connection. Miss Webber will be very much obliged to us, I'm sure. Supper, father."

"What's—what's the matter, Neal?" asked the old gentlemen, drawing his chair and himself by

little jerks to the table ; "*is* anything fresh the matter ?"

Neal coloured at this leading question. Why, what a bad actor he must be, and how badly must he have assumed the indifferent vein, to arouse even his father's suspicions at his ill-timed irony.

"Nothing's the matter. Beer, Mrs. Higgs, please—father, crust or crumb ?"

Mrs. Higgs departed, looking askance at Neal till the last, much to Neal's suppressed vexation ; and then supper was commenced, Neal breaking off abruptly after the first attempt to enjoy his bread and cheese, and pushing his plate away.

"No appetite ?" asked his father, with concern ; "then something *is* the matter ?"

"My good luck has taken my appetite away till to-morrow morning. And we are forgetting that health, after all !"

Having created a divergence from a dangerous topic, Neal led his father to discourse of the day's incidents ; submerging himself in thoughts of his own, but contriving, nevertheless, to answer very cleverly and readily when answers were required.

Carry Webber besieged by a pork-butcher !—what a drop from the land of romance to realism !

What would Carry think of her new lover?—and how would she consider his offer?—and in what manner would it be received, backed by such a father as he had encountered that evening? He felt very miserable—the day had been *too* full of incident for him, and he should be glad to be shut in his own room, and reflect upon it all. He was in love with Carry Webber!—why should he attempt to disguise that fact any longer—there was nothing to be ashamed of in the avowal; and she was very pretty, clever, and amiable. It might be the first young woman whom he had ever met—but he should never like another! Where he first loved, he should love always—oh! his head! how it ached!—oh! that pork-butcher!

He looked at his father wistfully. If he could have told him all!—he wanted no secrets from *him*; but he feared the revelation, and the perplexity it might create in a mind far from strong yet. He could seek no advice—he must act for himself, as he had acted since he was a boy, and might be compelled to act throughout his life. Only this morning he felt light and happy—and now a few words had rendered him utterly wretched, not alone for himself, he thought, but

for the girl who had crossed his path so strangely. Then he thought of the times that they had seen each other, Carry and he, and how frequently she had appeared at the windows of her house—too frequently for chance to have anything to do with it! She must have thought of him—she could not have objected to his smiles, for she had smiled back in return at him. She—*what was that?*

It was a rapid knocking at the street door below, and he thought of Carry on the instant. She had run away from Shepherd Street, and the pork-butcher, to seek comfort from her aunt—he was sure of it!

He strode across the room, and flung up the window, letting in the cold night air of the new year. Yes, he was right; it was Carry Webber in Fife Street, that was certain!

“My—my dear Neal!” exclaimed the father, with his teeth chattering, “you’ll give me my death of cold!”

“All right!—only a minute!” said Neal, in reply.

The noise of the opening window above her head caused Miss Webber to look up. His heart

quite leaped again at the cheerful, musical voice below him.

"Good evening, Mr. Galbraith—a happy new year to you!"

"And to you, Miss Webber," he called back.

"May I come down, and wish you that?"

"Not to-night, sir. I am not going to stop a minute!"

"Please!" adjured Neal.

"In five minutes, then," answered Miss Inconsistency; "if——"

"Come in, child, and don't talk in the streets like that. Didn't you ever learn better manners?" cried her aunt.

"Oh! yes—once!" was Carry's answer.

"What do you want? Why, what's that?"

"This is a basket, and that's a beer-jug. I'm maid-of-all-work in Shepherd Street—didn't you know that?"

"Come in—come in!"

The door closed, simultaneously with the descent of the drawing-room window. Neal returned to his seat, and found his father with his great-coat on.

"It's—it's horribly cold!—whatever made you let the frost in?"

"To wish Miss Webber a happy new year."

"Ve-ve-very kind of you, Neal; but you've nearly frozen my marrow. I shall never get warm any more!"

"Sit by the fire."

"No; I'll go to bed, I think."

Neal offered no objection to his father's suggestion; even escorted his father upstairs, and tucked him in for the night as usual. All this in five minutes, and then downstairs cautiously, like a thief; and going out of the front door on tiptoe, when charged at by Mrs Higgs.

"Who's that?"

"It is I, Mrs. Higgs," said Neal. "I shall be back in a minute."

"Hum!—I daresay you will."

Neal went on to the corner of Fife Street, and took up his post under the street-lamp. He would wish Miss Webber a happy new year there—he would even find courage to ask about that pork-butcher—to ask even if she had the courage and patience to wait for another man instead.

Yes, he would chance it. Why should he not?—he loved Carry Webber, and he thought that he should have the bravery to tell her so—he was

sure that he should! And she could but say 'No,' and put him out of his misery, and leave him to live her down—oh! yes, an end to all this in a straightforward fashion!

He waited ten minutes in the frost, becoming conscious at last that he had come out in his shooting-jacket; then he heard the door close of No. Fifteen, and beheld the figure of her, for whom he was watching, advancing towards him—flitting along rapidly and lightly.

"Now for it!" said Neal, between his closed lips; "I shall know the best or the worst in a minute!"

CHAPTER II.

NEAL MAKES AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

“A HAPPY new year to you once more, Miss Webber.”

“Is that you? How you startled me!”

Which was scarcely a fact, seeing that Miss Webber had anticipated this rencontre; but then young ladies must say something to appear unconcerned and quite at ease under similar circumstances.

“I thought that I would wish you a happy new year out here, for the reason that I have something to tell you about your father, in the first place,” said Neal, “and because it’s an excuse to escort you to Shepherd Street, in the second.”

Neal fought very hard for self-possession—he wished his proposal to come with a shock, if possible, which was an unfeeling desire of his, and but questionable policy.

"I don't think I shall allow of your escort, sir," said she, with a defiant little toss of the head.

"Just for once," pleaded Neal; "I have not seen you for so long—I have so much to say!"

They crossed the road together. On the other side of the way he offered her his arm, and she laughingly refused it, holding up a wicker-basket with one hand, and a stone jug and a door-key with the other.

"Weary and heavy-laden, Mr. Galbraith," said she; "we do not keep a servant in our establishment—mother and I work industriously morning, noon and night—I'm to be brought up with befitting humility."

"But they don't really make a drudge of you?"

"Not so great a drudge as you might expect; for my mother does the drudgery, against my will, and on purpose to aggravate everybody, I think—perhaps, after all, to spare me and my pride, though she will not own it. I never understood my mother—I never understood anybody—I am of slow perceptions."

"I'll not believe *that*!"

"Or I have met with very out-of-the-way people—but I am not discontented. I am

settling down now, content with everything!"

"Oh! I hope not!"

"You!—what's it to do with you?" she said, with her half-mocking, half-laughing face turned to him.

"I'll tell you in a minute, perhaps," he said; "will you not take my arm?"

"No, I can't!"

"Here, give me the basket and jug—pass them over!"

"No!" said she petulantly; "let them be under my shawl, and proceed with your revelations—what about my father?"

"I met him to-day."

"I know that—he told me so," she answered hurriedly; "is that all?"

"He told you that he objected to my passing your house, or looking towards it, as if I could help that, Miss Webber?"

"Perhaps you had better go some other way to business," she said demurely.

"No—I'm hanged if I——"

"You do not want to expose me to fresh taunts?—to further protests against my general behaviour?"

"Not for the world!"

"Then keep away from Shepherd Street. It can't afford you any pleasure to see me, and—I'm sure it don't afford me any pleasure to see you."

To have understood the effect of these words, one must have been proceeding towards Shepherd Street with this young couple. Printed in small pica type on this page, it reads like an insult, cool as the January night on which the dialogue took place; but it did not sound like one—for there was the old pleasant sauciness in the voice, and Carry Webber's spirits were high that evening.

"Possibly not, on your side," said Neal, whose heart beat faster with this badinage; "but on mine—how do you know?"

"I do not know, of course; but I cannot see why it should."

"Why should you, when you are engaged to be married?"

"What?"

Neal had not been sworn to secrecy, and he went on.

"You are engaged, or about to be engaged, to a—a pork butcher, a man with two shops, and nine children!"

"Aunt Higgs told you that?"

"Yes. It's no secret, I presume?"

"My mother told Aunt Higgs to-day—my father told my mother yesterday—the pork-butcher gave an idea of the state of his feelings on Sunday morning last to father. Those are the separate links of the chain—what do you think of them?"

"What do *you*?"

"I'll tell you afterwards, if we are not at Shepherd Street by that time."

"I think, perhaps, that I ought—to offer you—my congratulations. That is, if it's really likely to come to anything?"

"Congratulate me, then, on my change of life, will you?"

She looked imperiously at our hero, who felt withering up beneath her glances.

"No, I—I can't! I should be sorry to hear that it was all true."

"Is it not a temptation to get free? The widower is only forty-two, and is a weak-headed simpleton, who would let me have my own way, and do all in his power to make me happy—and I am unhappy at home, where no one loves me!

Besides, why should I be too proud for a shop?—what is there in *me*?”

“Still—you won’t have him, Miss Webber?”

“No. I won’t have him, because I am too proud, or he’s too old, or I am too capricious. I’m young enough to wait—I’m in no hurry—I have grown used to my home, and they cannot be more hard upon me for refusing him than they are now. I knew that they were set upon this scheme, and I have run over to Fife Street to-night to hear what my aunt has learned about it. I find that my father’s hints have not been thrown out wildly.”

“This does not seem to have distressed you, Miss Webber?”

“I have been pleased at it all. It is novelty, and dissipates the monotony of home; besides, it flatters one’s pride to have even won the affections of a pork-butcher. What could he find in me but a sullen, vain, disagreeable girl?—to be always seen at her worst in Shepherd Street!”

“He saw you—that was enough!”

“Oh! was it?”

“It has been enough for me!” said Neal.

Carry Webber began to walk on at a great pace. She did not respond to his last remark,

which tore aside the flimsy veil that had hung between them both. Neal had broken through the ice; after all, he was a bold lover, and shrank not from the avowal. She seemed vanishing away from him; his heart was young; this was his first love, his first romance, and he made one plunge after the ideal, and risked all, knowing so little!

"It has been enough for me," he repeated, laying his hand upon her arm; "to see you has been to love you, Carry. Don't turn away your head, or run away from me, just listen! I do love you very dearly; I want you to love me, to wait for me, and become my wife; to teach me how to deserve you by my patience, and my deep affection."

"Don't say any more!" she murmured; and Neal, looking into her face, saw that she was crying.

"Yes, I'll say all now, and have your answer. I have been in suspense, thinking of you so much, and wondering if you ever thought of me. And I'm two years older than you are, and able to take care of you, protect you, make you happy, if you will only try to give me love for love! Ours would be so happy a life, so contented a home,

and I should rescue you from those who do not value you as you deserve. I understand you—they don't. Come to my side, Carry, and leave them. I love you with all my heart, I tell you!"

She slid her arm away from his hand, and hastened on. The jug fell and split into fifty pieces against the kerb stone, but created no diversion; suitor and maiden had forgotten the common things—the common accidents of life. Neal only knew that he could snatch at her hand now, and draw it through his arm; that she let it rest there, struggling no more, and heard again the story of his love, shaken by its earnestness, and still shedding tears for it.

She became calm at last.

"And you know so little of me! And yet you could put up with my bad temper, my odd ways, better than they could—you would make allowances for me, and not scold me, more of a child, perhaps, than you think, Neal. Oh! I should have been a good woman—I know I should—if I had been differently brought up!"

"You are all that is good, Carry—I am sure of it," cried Neal; "I would not have you different in anything for all the world."

"Then I'll love you, Neal, and be ever, ever true to you—there!"

"God bless you, Carry!—this is real happiness."

They were in the darkest part of the street; it could not have happened better for "the proprieties;" most of the shops were closed; the frost had kept in doors all wanderers but one there, and he was standing with his back to them, trying to get a light to his pipe in a shady doorway. They had the street to themselves, and Neal put his arm round her waist, and drew her closer to him, stooping his face down to hers, which shrank but a very little away from his impassioned kiss.

It was all over in a minute, and when the man with his pipe comfortably lighted came out of the doorway towards them, he saw but a young man and woman arm in arm, the young woman's bonnet just a little flattened in front. Still he stopped after he had passed, and looked after them, shading his eyes with his hand, and bending a little forwards.

"That looks like Carry," he muttered to himself; "I might have watched till doomsday!"

The lovers went on together, with their hearts

too full to take heed of people by the way. They had still much to say to each other before they parted, and Carry was anxious to speak first.

"And you must never tire of me, Neal—or think that you might have done better, some day, than marry a wilful sly girl like me."

"Is it likely?"

"And—and there's Mr. Tressider. I shouldn't like you not to know about him and me."

"He has told me all—I see nothing in it. It was a flirtation, thank goodness, that never came to anything; I'm not likely to be jealous about that."

"I am so glad!"

"We can't waste the time talking of Mr. Tressider just now," said Neal; "let us think of all this, and what we shall do. In the first place, I shall call on your father."

"Oh!" ejaculated Carry.

"He shall not say that I acted dishonourably towards him. I'll tell him that we both love each other—that I have a salary of a hundred and twenty pounds a-year, and can keep you upon it—that I'll wait, if he particularly wishes it, till I'm one-and-twenty, although I see no reason why we should not be married next week."

"Go on, Neal, and don't talk such nonsense as that!"

"I'll lay everything plainly before him, and ask for his consent."

"He'll never give it, I'm afraid."

"I don't see why he should not. He will think of your happiness, when it comes to the grand question, I'm sure. He's a little abrupt, but he means well, Carry."

"We'll hope for the best—but if the worst comes?"

"We must resist it, and be true to each other, watching our opportunity, and biding our time."

She pressed his arm with her hand.

"You may tire of opposition."

"Not I. But you, who are weaker—younger?"

"I have been used to opposition all my life, Neal—they cannot tire me out."

"Then we shall be happy—we must be happy, Carry! What is to hinder us?"

"Nothing, I hope."

"Now let me tell you of my father—he will not be so bad as nine children to manage—and you will have him love you like his daughter, for he is so gentle-hearted and affectionate a man."

"Like his son, Neal?" said she, archly.

Neal was obliged to kiss her again for that; in his intoxication he was becoming reckless of consequences, and he did not look to see if any one were about or not. *He* was in a world of his own then!

"There, Neal, I must run away now, and get my usual scolding, bearing it with more equanimity than ever. Good night."

"Not yet—I haven't told you about my father—all I want to tell you concerning him."

"But it's so late, Neal."

"Five minutes more, dearest;" and they turned their backs upon Shepherd Street, and sauntered away from the parental roof again. Then Neal told her of his father's life, misfortunes, and mental weakness, and asked her if she could bear with that father for the husband's sake, in the good time a-head for both of them.

"I am proud of the old gentleman—very careful of him—without me he would die. With you to be his daughter in my absence, he would be happier, and I want you to learn to love him for his own sake as well as mine."

Carry was a sensible girl, young as she was. She answered readily and frankly.

"I shall love him, Neal, but I do not think that he will add to my happiness, living with us, and not understanding the wilful girl whom his son has taken to wife. Old people never understand young ones, and they will love each other better at a little distance apart."

"But he is weak—he is very different from most old men—a child can lead him."

"Neal, if you wish it, I will not say No. Perhaps," with a little shudder, "I cannot understand what a loving father is. If I be happy with him, why, that's enough. And Neal Galbraith will always like his own way, I can see."

"When it does not clash with the will and the way of this dear, impudent sweetheart of mine."

"There, let me go, Neal, now. It is very late. Good night."

"Good night, then," said he, "and to-morrow to state my intentions, and cut out the pork-butcher, Carry!"

"Yes, yes—let me go. God bless you!—good night."

Then she darted away from him and his proffered caress, and ran home to Shepherd Street, arriving there flushed and breathless. She opened

the door with the key, shut the door after her, and went into the passage and parlour, to find the gas out and the parents nowhere.

She lighted a candle with some difficulty, and looked at the untasted supper and the empty chairs, realizing the facts of the case very speedily. Mr. and Mrs. Webber had taken offence at her delay, her non-appearance with the supper-beer, and retired to rest, leaving her to isolation. Carry locked up the house and followed them, glad of the slight that had been put upon her, and recking not of the black looks in store for her next day. She was glad to be alone, to meet with no vexatious questions that night, to be enabled to steal up to her room, and lock herself in with all the new bewildering thoughts that had dashed at her, to alter her life. She fastened her door, flung bonnet and shawl away from her impetuously, then dropped into a chair, leaned her elbows on the dressing-table, and clutched her dimpled chin with both hands. It was a lovely face in the looking-glass before her, but she did not look towards it, which was strange for Carry, bewildered though she was. For a while she forgot it, and sat thinking and looking downwards, passing

in review the incidents of that night, and of more than that night, till the head drooped, and sought shelter in the folded arms, where it rested till heavy convulsive sobs began to echo strangely in that room.

She shook herself away from grief by sitting up and dashing away the tears with both hands wildly. She flung back from her face her disordered golden hair, and looked into the glass at last, addressing excitedly her second self there.

"He is too good for me; why should I fear the happiness he offers me—me who have never been happy yet? I will try to love him with all my heart—oh! how I will try for both our sakes, forgetting *everything!*"

CHAPTER III.

BARRIERS IN THE WAY.

NEAL went homewards rejoicing. There were no misty by-gones for him—far away echoes from a past where hopes had been different—the bloom was on the fruit of the Hesperides, and the choicest prize was in his grasp. He had been happy in his loves, and all was well! He was sure of happiness for ever after this, for he was sanguine, and but twenty years of age. People said that he looked older than his years, and thought more than was good for him; but he was younger in thought than most men that night, and his thoughts pure and entrancing made his eyes sparkle and his step light.

He was marching homewards, when a man touched him on the shoulder, and reminded him of Mr. Webber's greeting earlier that day. Had the irascible father overtaken him again?

"I beg your pardon—but you were speaking to Miss Webber just now."

Neal did not recognize the voice or, when he turned, the speaker. The night was dark, and the lamps burned dimly, but the intruder on his reverie was evidently a stranger to him—a short thin man, shabbily attired, with a cap slouched forwards over his eyes, and a pipe in his mouth. Neal knew him not, and felt inclined to resent his interference.

"What of it?" he inquired.

"Nothing much—something it may be," he said, in a thick voice—the voice of a man whose potatoes had been deep that evening, "for she's a good girl, and mustn't be led away by a parcel of young swells. She's got more protectors than you are possibly aware of."

"Or you either," answered Neal.

"If it's all square—if you mean honest—why, I've nothing to say against it, of course," said the man; "but there's no telling what you fellows mean. You're not young Tressider, that's pretty evident, I think, unless I'm—I'm more drunk than I fancy I am!"

"What do you know of Tressider?"

"I did a little business for him once in rigging up a stage—just a little, though he didn't know who I was, and didn't care. And afterwards I had an idea that he was making up to our Carry, not that I knew anything about it. And now here's you, whoever *you* may be."

"And who are you?"

"I'm a disgrace to the family of Webber—I'm looked down upon by every one of my acquaintance—I'm the unluckiest devil that ever made himself a nuisance to society—a disgrace to myself and everybody connected with me!—why, my own father wouldn't own me, sir!"

"You are the brother—Carry's brother?"

"Such I am, sir," elevating himself upon his heels, and speaking with becoming dignity, but in a rusty falsetto, "and she sticks by me like a trump as she is. If it was not for her, I should have been dead long ago; and I'll stick by her, if any one means harm, so help my—"

"There, there, go home, my man, and console yourself with the assurance that no one respects your sister more than I do, or would do more to promote her happiness than I. That's all. Good night."

"Yes, it's all very fine, but who's to back your gorgeous sentiments, my—chap? I don't believe that there's anybody to take care of Carry, or to protect Carry, but—me! Steady, sir—the ground's a trifle uneven about here, owing to two parishes coming together, and not exactly agreeing whose pavement it is! Do you mind me holding your arm a bit while we talk this matter over?"

"Not now. Some other time, you and Carry and I together."

"At our house, with Mrs. Webber, junior—eh?"

"As good a place as any," assented Neal.

"It's as good a place as you can get for the money this side of the water—and Mrs. Webber will be ex—tremely glad to see you."

"Good night, then."

"Good ni-ght, sir."

Mr. Webber, junior, raised his cap from his head, our hero returned the salute, and strode onwards, leaving his late companion with his back against a post looking after him. This was an ugly shadow to cross the bright path that Neal had been pursuing, but he chased it away with the old thoughts. Carry's brother, probably—but a man

with whom he should have little to do, and one who had evidently not been turned out of doors without a fair reason for it. A *bête noire*, but nothing to trouble him—simply a foil to Carry Webber's brightness.

He had forgotten his latch-key, and had to be admitted by Mrs. Higgs, whom he feared somewhat. And yet Mrs. Higgs must shortly know the whole story from her sister—was he not going in the morning to state his intentions to Mr. Webber, and solicit the honour of an alliance with the family, and might not Mrs. Higgs give him some sound and profitable advice? He thought that he would take that good lady into his confidence.

"What, without your great-coat this biting night?" she exclaimed—"of all the 'prudent boys I ever heerd on, you're one!"

"I was in a hurry, and forgot it."

"Yes, to go trapesing after that gal—you ought to have something better to think on than that!"

"Mrs. Higgs, I wish to trust you with a secret," said our hero—"may I step into the parlour for a minute?"

"You're allers welcome—go in," she said.

She was in the room herself the instant after-

wards, sitting at the table with her thin hands drumming upon it, and her sharp grey eyes fixed eagerly upon her visitor.

"I know what you are a-going to say—oh! more's the pity!—you've been and tied yourself to Carry Webber."

"More's the good fortune, Mrs. Higgs; there's not such another girl in all the world!"

"She isn't fit for you—she's never likely to settle down with wild blood in her like her brother's—like her mother's, and father's, for the matter of that, though I say it myself. Oh! dear, dear, how could you be so foolish?"

"I could not lose my chance of happiness, Mrs. Higgs. It was fading away from me, and I knew that I loved her. Why, I don't mind telling you now that I fell in love with her the very first day that I ever saw her."

"Ah! everybody says that," said Mrs. Higgs moodily—"well, it's done! I don't 'plain about it; you'll make her a good husband, and praps she'll make you a good wife, for she's not all bad, and she's 'fectionate in her way. It ain't my place to run down my own niece, but I've often thought that a tight hand like her father's on her was not

the werry wust thing to bring her up proper. But is it really—*settled*, Master Neal?"

"Settled irrevocably."

"A boy like you!—good lor! a boy of your age settling things like these so coolly! Why, I couldn't be 'gaged myself, even now, without going into fits, and here you are as cool as Christmas—what'll your father say?"

"My father must not know anything about it, Mrs. Higgs," said Neal, firmly; "he is too weak in mind to disturb or consult. I am a man acting for myself, and taking the consequence of my acts—I do not fear them in this instance."

"Poor old gentleman!"

"We shall make him happy, Carry and I—we have talked about that already; she will take her place at his side one day, and say: 'Father, I have come to keep house with you, and to cheer you up while Neal's at business,'—and then all will go on famously."

"I'll pray it will—I hope it will!" cried Mrs. Higgs with excitement. "I know nothing agin Carry, and I'm ony an old woman full of 'bodings, which is natural at my age. I'll wish and pray the very best for two such young things about to take

each other for all their lives—and taking it so coolly, too, that bothers me! I'll wish you every joy together, and try for it in my own way, if you'll let me; and I'll be as proud of a Galbraith marrying into my family, as though it was a Markis going to be 'lated to me!"

"Thank you—thank you, Mrs. Higgs," said Neal; "you'll be my friend, and keep my secret from the old gentleman up-stairs. *Now*, be my adviser."

"I don't see much good in my 'vising of you now."

"Your brother-in-law, Mr. Webber," Neal said, "what is the best way to proceed with him? I must see him in the morning."

"That's 'raightforward," she replied, "and praps he'll like it. Not that I ever knew him to like anything yet, but praps he will."

"There's—there's no particular way that you could recommend me to adopt towards him?" suggested our hero, somewhat anxiously—"I should like him for a friend, of course."

"I can't give any advice," said Mrs. Higgs despairingly, "that'd help you to get over *him*. I did alter him once, and got him to give his son another

trial, and it ended badly for them both. He may be glad to see Carry in the hands of somebody who'll love and 'tect her—that's all I can say."

And that was all that Neal could obtain in the way of advice from Mrs. Higgs ; she could not see a way to soften the obduracy of Mr. Webber, if he were obdurately inclined, and she could but offer a faint hope that he might be pleased to be rid of a daughter to whom he had never been affectionate.

After this Neal went to bed, and passed a restless night thinking of his hopes and fears. His hopes of happiness with Carry, and his fears of opposition springing up hydra-headed at every step he took. But his hopes were in the foreground still, for he had gained Carry's consent, and he did not believe in an opposition that could weaken their love for one another. He *was* a happy fellow, he thought, and he went to sleep about four in the morning congratulating himself on his good fortune.

He was not so absent as might be expected over his breakfast the next morning ; there was his father to attend to, and, after a fashion, even to deceive. He pictured to himself a third face at the breakfast-table presently—bright and beautiful,

and gladdening home with its presence. His father would love Carry next to himself, after the first little surprise at her appearance had been surmounted; everything would turn out for the best—let him but keep his father's mind undisturbed by speculations as to a change so great, and affecting him so much.

All this on his mind and yet talking of everyday matters to his father, finally leaving for office half an hour earlier, in order that he might call upon Mr. Webber, before the worry of that gentleman's business had disturbed his equanimity for the day.

Neal, earnest and energetic as was his character, found considerable difficulty in crawling down Shepherd Street that day; nervousness seized him at the corner of the street, and the disagreeable nature of his task suggested itself with greater force at every step he took. To meet the father of one's beloved is always uphill work—*paterfamilias* with his eyes closed to the romance of the thing, and with his pockets buttoned against demands for supplies, for instance; but to meet a father whose blessing one may feel doubtful concerning, and whose opinion of the match may be adverse to the match-seeker, is a task that makes the heart beat and the

knees shake. Neal had no idea that it would take so much "nerve;" he had set it down as part of his duty, and had resolved upon fulfilling his task with an easy grace and dignity that should even impress Mr. Webber; but the closer he approached the carriage-breaker's domain, the more vividly his imagination conjured up the wooden-faced gentleman who had spoken his mind only yesterday!

"I think I'll leave it till I come back from business," muttered Neal, taking off his hat to let the frosty air cool his forehead for an instant; "perhaps he's busy early in the morning."

He put on his hat once more and started off for the wharf, passing Mr. Webber's house at a quick pace, and not even looking towards it, an act of deference to his future father-in-law which might tell in his favour that afternoon, he hoped. Once past the house, he slackened his speed—stopped.

"It will be just the same in the afternoon—worse, perhaps," said he, "I may as well have it over with him, like a man. I never was afraid of speaking out before—and I will not be now. Here goes with a vengeance!"

Neal, shutting his ears to the whispers of fear, right-about-faced and marched once more into

Shepherd Street—crossing the road with his shoulders squared and his hands clenched. It was a resolute face, and its expression did not change as he neared the house again. He marched on, opened the gate, strode over some carriage-springs that were in the way, plunged at the knocker, and announced his arrival. His heart was beating unnaturally fast, and his knees were at it worse than ever; but his face was set due north, and only the excitement within him turned it a shade paler than its wont.

The door opened, and Carry Webber stood in the doorway.

“Oh!” she exclaimed.

“Wish me luck, Carry. Where’s your father? —I’m going to speak up for us both.”

Carry, red and white, stood and gasped at our hero. His precipitate action had taken her breath away.

“Take in my card, there’s a dear girl,” he said, hurriedly; “tell him it’s business of very great importance.”

“Oh! Neal, may not this be too hasty?” she murmured.

“I can’t bear suspense—I must know how to

act. Whether to esteem your father, or to set myself in opposition against him."

"He's at breakfast—go in at once, then, Neal, and talk to him and mother. I had better not send in your card—he hates formality, and that will set him against you. This way."

Neal closed the street-door after him, and followed her down the passage to the parlour-door, which Carry opened.

"Father," she said, "here's a gentleman wishes to speak to you—Mr. Galbraith."

Then she made way for Neal to pass her, and hurried upstairs with a glowing face.

Neal passed into the room, and made his best bow. Mr. Webber was having his breakfast in his shirt-sleeves, and, as Neal entered, was blowing vigorously at his coffee, which he had tilted into his saucer for that purpose.

Mrs. Webber, erect and grim, with mittens on, sat before a battered tin coffee-pot, the president of the feast. On a blue dish was a square chunk of bacon, very fat, with a very brown and bristly rind—in another blue dish was a half-quartern loaf with a knife sticking in it. There had been set a plate of butter on the table, but Mr. and Mrs.

Webber had condemned the innovation as extravagant, and removed it to the mantelpiece. The room was small, ill-furnished, and darkened by trade obstructions without the window; it was altogether a home to shudder at, and from which it seemed merciful to rescue Carry.

Mr. Webber continued to poise his saucer in the air, and blow vigorously at the fluid it contained, staring at our hero meanwhile. Mrs. Webber's head revolved on its axis towards the same centre of attraction, the body retaining its fixed form.

"Good morning, sir—good morning, madam."

Mr. Webber continued to blow, sending little dashes of coffee spray on to his wife's shoulder. Mrs. Webber condescended to say—

"And a good morning to you, sir."

Having decreased the temperature of his coffee, Mr. Webber took it off at one gulp, in black draught fashion, set down his saucer, and then broke silence.

"What's the matter?"

"I have taken the liberty of calling upon you at this early hour, to state the nature of my business, Mr. Webber."

"So I see."

"Hannah's not taken, I hope?" inquired Mrs. Webber.

"Taken—dead—Mrs. Higgs you mean?—oh! no," said our hero.

"She was looking orful bad surely, yesterday."

"When you've done *jawing*, Mrs. Webber, I'll try and speak," said her husband.

"Mayn't I open my mouth a hinstant?" snapped Mrs. W.

"When anybody's got time to be entertained with what comes out of it," was the answer; "not just now."

"I don't want to speak."

"Then don't."

"I won't speak for a week!" she cried.

"Just as it suits your convenience, Mrs. Webber—I shan't ask you."

Mrs. Webber indulged in an angry sniff of defiance, and proceeded to replenish the cups.

"Well, what's the nature of *your* business, young fellow? I hope," he added, ironically, "you haven't come to call me out for my plain speaking yesterday? If you give me choice of weapons, I say—horsewhips."

Neal's face changed colour, and there rose a retort to his lips as well as a flush to his cheeks. He felt his old tempers were not quite dead within him—those angry passions which he had told Mrs. Higgs he had utterly subdued. But this man was Carry's father, and he must command himself, accept all insults, put up with all contumely, for the sake of her he loved.

"I have called to bespeak your kind consideration for me as a suitor for your daughter's hand," said Neal, calmly and distinctly—it was the only speech he had attempted to rehearse last night—"I admire and love Miss Webber—I feel that I can make her happy, and I ask you not to stand between us, but to add to our felicity by granting your consent. I think I can prove that I am already in a position to support her, and that the future welfare of us both depends upon your verdict."

"You mean you want to marry Carry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why don't you say so?"

"I have said so."

"May I ask how old you are?"

"I am in my twenty-first year, sir."

Neal flattered himself that that sounded better and *older* than saying that he was twenty years of age.

"And what's your wages?"

"I am in the receipt of a hundred and twenty pounds per annum—my father, who will live with us, has also an income of his own."

"How much?"

"About fifty pounds or so a year."

"Ah! that's handsome!" said Mr. Webber; "have you anything more to say?"

"Nothing, except that Carry and I are—are attached to each other, and hope that you will not refuse us your consent."

"I think——" began Mrs. Webber.

"Never mind what *you* think," interrupted her husband; "you'll leave me to answer this young fellow, if *you* please. I'm just going to say what *I* think."

"Well, sir?" said Neal.

"I think," said Mr. Webber, putting his hands upon his knees, "that you're a fool."

"I am of a different opinion, sir," replied Neal, taken off his guard again.

"That's possible," added Mr. Webber, "but you're

a fool for all that. You're twenty years of age, and inclined to marry, like a fool, the first young woman who makes eyes at you. You've got an income that'll just keep yourself in boots and bacca, and you want to keep a wife with it—or you may want me to keep the couple of you when you're out of work, which wouldn't be quite so foolish an idea as the t'other one—and above all, you want to tie yourself to a girl who is no more fit for you than that woman," pointing to his wife, "was ever fit for me."

"A norrible day it was when I took up with such a rip," retorted Mrs. Webber; "fit for you, indeed! You're fit for nothing but to bully people."

"I think we'll have our little talk out when this young fellow's gone," said Mr. Webber, a wise suggestion on his part, at least, but then he was a man of greater education than his wife, and education tends to refine people.

Mrs. Webber sniffed again, and crossed her mittens in her lap.

"I don't say that you haven't acted on the square, young fellow,"—Neal writhed every time this appellation was addressed to him—"or

that I think the worse of you for it, quite the contrary. But I've made up my mind, and you might as well try to change my head into a pumpkin as to alter *me*. You don't have her!"

"I do not wish for an answer at once, sir—I——"

"You don't have her! She's to be married to some one else, and you can't have her. She'll have a good home and a business of her own, and you can't offer either. You're only a boy, and it's all infernal nonsense coming here and talking like a man."

"You're much too young," said Mrs. Webber, darting in again, this time on her husband's side.

"Madam, I only wish your consent to our engagement—I will wait as long as you and Mr. Webber please, till you think I'm old enough, or well-off enough to take her for a wife."

"Well, that's fair."

Mr. Webber could not endure this innovation any longer.

"It don't matter a curse what's fair or unfair—it's settled—I won't have young fellows like you for a son-in-law, coming here with your fine notions and your *grandeur*! I hate people out of business,

and clerks were always my abomination—and the long and the short of it is, you won't suit, and the sooner you're out of here the better."

"Will you not take into consideration the feelings of your own daughter in this matter?"

"Won't I take into consideration the feelings of that cat?" said Mr. Webber, suddenly stamping on the tail of a scrubby grey mouser at his feet, and eliciting a hideous yell from that animal in consequence; "no, I won't!"

"She is prepared to put up with my youth, my salary, the home that I can offer her."

"And the mad father into the bargain! Ah! anything to get away from here."

"Sir, not a word against my father, please," cried Neal, rising and looking fiercely at his tormentor; "I have been taught to honour him—and his affliction, though it belongs to the past, must not be sneered at in my presence."

"What school were you brought up at?—I never had sons or daughters to honour me!"

Neal could have asked whether that was the fault of the father or the children, but he was subsiding again into quiescence, and was hoping against hope still.

"You're a wonder; I suppose," continued Mr. Webber. "Well, you're much too wonderful for me—I'm only a poor carriage-breaker, and can't afford to have such gentility in my family."

"You can afford to promote your daughter's happiness, I trust, sir."

"She don't know where her happiness lies—she'll never be happy anywhere—it isn't in her nature. And she shan't have a chance with you, at all events!"

"Oh! yes—she shall."

"What's that? Do you mean to have her in spite of me?"

"I mean to keep true to her, and to believe in her truth towards me. If you will not give her a chance of happiness, I will, sir—if she'll take it, and trust me. I cannot believe in any will of yours strong enough to thwart me; you give me no fair reason for an answer—nothing but insult. I dispute your right to act like this—I warn you that I shall not give up my love at your bidding—I shall be true to her, sir!"

Neal, in his impetuosity, acted like a boy balked of a prize; but his love was as strong as his youth, and he had been stung to a frenzy by Mr. Web-

ber's crudities. He stood up and delivered his defiance with his chest heaving, and his head thrown back; he dashed out of the house after his last words, and left husband and wife to consider them, and make such preparation as they might against the warning they conveyed. He looked up at the windows, and waved his hand to Carry, watching for him from her room; she could read the result from his flushed face, and the grave expression thereon.

It was nothing to be surprised at; it was all that she had expected, knowing her father's character, and having had several intimations as to his disposal of her. It was all on a par with the contrarities that had met her at every step in life, and made her callous, indifferent, even at times untruthful. She was armed at all points, and was prepared for everything. It had been an unhappy home; she had not always done her best to make it happy, though she thought she had—anything, anywhere to escape from it, and feel herself free!

CHAPTER IV.

GLOBE COURT.

NEAL GALBRAITH had to bear two days of sore perplexity—forty-eight hours of suspense as to how Carry—his Carry!—was being treated at Shepherd Street after his avowal. He thought that he had concealed his embarrassment in business hours pretty well, until Mr. Pike turned his weak eyes towards him, and asked if anything were wrong.

“N—no, sir,” was Neal’s answer; but going away from business that night, Pike asked again if Neal were quite sure that nothing was the matter?

“It’s nothing particular, Mr. Pike, at any rate,” Neal answered, thus adjured.

“You’re not getting into debt?”

“Not I.”

“Your father is as well as ever?”

“Better, sir.”

"And you—you haven't formed any bad acquaintances?" urged Mr. Pike—"so much depends upon that here and—hereafter."

"No bad acquaintances, Mr. Pike."

"Then why don't you tell me?" he asked, fretfully—"what's the good of going on like this?"

Neal was surprised at this little peevish outburst, and yet touched by Mr. Pike's interest in him.

"I will tell you in good time, sir. Trust me that there's nothing wrong with me—and nothing that is likely to be wrong in anything."

"You may always come to me for the best advice, Neal," said Mr. Pike, almost conceitedly; "I wouldn't, if I were you, rely quite so much upon my own judgment. You're far from a fool, Neal, but you are open to one temptation—we all are morally weak somewhere. Didn't you know that?"

"It never struck me before."

"I'll bring you a tract I wrote about that tomorrow. You'll be pleased with the line of argument."

"Thank you."

"And I want you to bring your father to tea with me and Addie. You'll be surprised to

find how Addie has improved, since you saw her last."

"Indeed!"

"And you'll bring your father to tea?"

"I am afraid that we are engaged this week, thank you, Mr. Pike."

"If you can—do. It will be a change for your father, and I should like to see him very much."

"When he gets a little stronger, he shall come, sir."

"Thank you. Good day."

They parted at the street corner, and Neal went home, to be tormented by further curiosity, this time on the part of Mrs. Higgs. He put that good lady off with a few words.

"The father's against me—nothing much to be wondered at in that."

"Then it's all broken off?"

"When my head's broken off," said Neal, decisively.

Later that evening, Neal found an opportunity to dart to Shepherd Street. Carry was drudge, and might be sent on errands; and he waited full of that hope for an hour—trusting to good-fortune to see her. But Mrs. Webber went on errands

that night, and even crossed the road for the supper-beer.

Neal gave up his vigils after that; Carry was kept a prisoner to the house; his own impetuosity had brought upon her further indignities; and until he could rescue her from bondage he should never know a moment's peace of mind.

The next night he was on the watch again; and this time he was rewarded for his perseverance by the great gates at the side of the house being unfastened, and Carry's face peering out anxiously for him.

He dashed across the road, and into the dark archway.

"Carry, is it you?"

"Yes; I thought that you might be looking for me."

"Might be!"

She let him hold her in his arms a moment, and kiss her in the shadows, and then she gently struggled herself away from him

"We are lovers still, Carry!" said Neal; "always lovers, until we are married. Nothing is to stand in the way of our affection—I told your father yesterday that nothing should."

"My brave Neal!" she murmured.

"Have they been very cross with you?"

"Father has—mother has at times, not invariably. I might persuade her this time to be on our side, but then he"—sinking her voice lower, and shuddering—"would strike her!"

"Good heaven!—so bad as that?"

"He struck me last night, and——"

"The devil that he is!—I won't have this!—I'll go to him now!—I'll——!"

She laid her hand upon his arm.

"Patience, Neal! You must bear this, if I can. I have made up my mind; and I don't give way, any more than he does."

It was too dark to see that stern, set expression of her face—better that he did not, perhaps.

"What's to be done?" said Neal; "we must meet each other now and then. Why shouldn't we be married at once, and then I could protect you for good?"

"Give me time to see if I shall be able to love you well enough for that, sir!" she said, in her old merry tones.

Neal made a dash at her to clasp her in his arms, and fell amongst some carriage-springs in the

corner, getting entangled amongst them, and bringing himself and them down with a clatter against the gates.

"Oh! you clumsy Neal!" cried the alarmed Carry; "run away—we shall be discovered!"

"But to-morrow—to-morrow!"

"I will meet you coming home from business, if I can. Look out for me!"

Neal flew for his life. He went home very happy; he had been assured of Carry Webber's love for him, and of her resolve to keep true to him; and though it had been a fugitive meeting, under a gateway full of mustiness and stuffiness, it had been a happy meeting enough, brightened by her confidence and love.

Neal had stepped into romance, which was a bad thing for a youth who had his way to make in the world. His courtship was out of the common way, and had turned Carry Webber into a heroine; it might have been better for all had Mr. Webber accepted him as a suitor for his daughter's hand, and let things flow on smoothly to the end. A long engagement, with no barriers in the way, would have been better for these young people, even if they had seen too much of

each other, and grown a little tired of love's monotony. For Neal was too young, Carry Webber too impulsive, and the matter-of-fact every-day life for them would have been so much the wiser plan, could Mr. Webber but have known it.

But Mr. Webber's interdict took Neal and Carry into the new world—that strange, disturbed, unreal, pleasant hemisphere, where first love is at furnace heat,—where the heart beats irregularly, and the air is enervating and affects the brain. Opposition tinged this courtship with hues of its own, and drew the lovers closer together, the ridiculous taking the place of the sublime occasionally, but all tending to strengthen their thoughts of each other, and to constitute them leading characters in a love story where all the world was against their happy union.

Carry met Neal coming from business, and they walked home arm-in-arm together, discoursing of their troubles, arranging plans for meeting, laying down all those secret signs for seeing and hearing of each other, which tend so much to distract and endanger, for they lure young folk out of the common way, and strange roads lead heaven knows whither!

Carry objected to visiting Mrs. Higgs now. Her aunt's house would be a *rendezvous* where they could easily be surprised by father or mother, and it was better that Mrs. Higgs should not know too much, lest fear should betray her to Carry's father, or she should endeavour, after her own fashion, to settle matters amicably.

No, with so much in the way, they must arrange their own plans, and bide their time, and the less Mr. Webber had to suspect the better. Presently Carry thought her father would consider the love affair broken off; he was a man proud of his will, and confident in its power, and he would believe that Carry had given up her thoughts of Neal, just as Neal, tired with opposition, had outgrown *his* love; then they should see each other more frequently, and be always—oh! so happy. And if they were wrong in that surmise, and the danger to their peace grew more formidable, why, it was only to be married quietly, and end all opposition.

Neal, in his hot haste, would have married at once, but Carry showed more thought than he at this juncture.

"There's no hurry, Neal; let us wait and make

sure that we like each other—you and I are young enough to wait.”

“But all this hiding about—this love on the sly!”

“We had better get tired of that than of each other’s company afterwards. No, I’ll not marry yet. I have made up my mind, and you cannot change it.”

Neal found that this was true enough, and continued his love-making; across the warp of matter-of-fact life shot the golden threads of his romance, altering the pattern and brightening it, giving to it hues of their own, which might fade or wear for ever—it was doubtful which, for all depended upon those accidents with which life is full.

It was arranged between them that they were not to meet too frequently, lest the opposition in the way should become more strong in lieu of growing weaker—once a fortnight they were to see each other, on the first and fifteenth of every month, and in the face of every obstacle. In the interim it was considered better policy to give up the Shepherd Street route to business, even to pass each other in the street, if chance brought about a

meeting, without sign of recognition; to be content with looking forward to those appointed days when they could be lovers again, and tell each other of their thoughts and wishes. All this was unreal; it was out of the usual way of courtship, quite a Romeo and Juliet affair. Almost pleasant to pass her in the street—as Neal did pass her walking with her mother in the St. George's Road once—to look another way, as though all was over between them, and to think of the days striding on, which should set them side by side and hand in hand again.

Neal always met his lady-love at the Blind School at the corner of the London Road, and then they sauntered away the evening, arm-in-arm, talking of their future, of their trust in one another, of the love that was never to grow less between them, of the opposition which only strengthened love, for it rendered Carry Webber a fair martyr for his sake. Finally, there was the parting behind the barouche, which still remained in its entirety in the front garden—the farewell kiss, which Carry granted after a little feeble opposition, and which kept Neal's heart vibrating till they met again.

As they expected fair weather with their loves

through life, so they had not thought of foul weather interrupting their lovers' meetings, till the fifteenth of February set in, bleak, and cold, and snowy. Neal wondered if Carry would be true to her appointment that night, as he set out to the place of meeting, and whether it would be wise of her—she was not very strong, he sometimes fancied—to brave the elements for his sake. But Carry Webber kept her word, and was there to meet him. To Neal's astonishment, she came not alone, however, but accompanied by a man, whom Neal at last recognized as the shabby individual who had asked him his "intentions" on the first of January that year.

"Don't be alarmed, Neal, dear," said Carry; "this is a friend. This is my brother Joe, who was turned out of doors by my father, but whom I could not give up at anybody's bidding. He has always been a friend of mine. And this gentleman," to her brother, "is the Mr. Galbraith of whom I have just been speaking!"

"Proud to have the pleasure of an introduction, sir," said Joe Webber, nodding his head familiarly towards Neal; "have just a foggy idea that I spoke to you once before—but then *screwed* I was, you see."

"Just a little *screwed*, perhaps," said Neal, adopting his word, and inclined to be conciliatory.

"My brother has been waiting to see me all the evening," said Carry, by way of explanation for his presence there; "he is going into the country for a month, and—and wished to bid me good-bye. He has been kind enough to ask us to spend the evening with him, the weather being against us, Neal."

"It's not a home fit for a gentleman to step into," said Joseph apologetically, "but you're welcome to it, and it's better than courting one another in the snow. I'd do anything for Carry—so would Mrs. Webber."

"And I have not seen Mrs. Webber yet, remember," said Carry to her brother.

Neal reflected somewhat gloomily upon this proposition; he had not been struck very much by Mr. Webber's offer, but the snow was descending heavily, and the night was cold. Better anywhere with Carry, than in a palace without her.

Carry came to him and said almost sharply:

"My brother—are you ashamed of him, Neal?"

"I know nothing about him, Carry. I daresay he's a very good fellow."

"You must like him for my sake. He's very poor, but then that's not his fault, and does not set aside the relationship. He was always kind to me, and I stand by him. I know that he's weak, foolish, and fond of drink—poor Joe!—but I know that he likes me, bears no malice against any one in the world, and is only his own enemy. I wish I were as content as he—I wouldn't mind being as poor!"

"Has anything happened, Carry?"

"Yes—a little something—I'll tell you presently—I'm put out to-night, and I want my own way in this matter. They can never blame you and me if we meet at my own brother's house."

"Have they blamed us?"

"We were seen together last time, Neal, and my father has been more hard with me, and threatens me with punishment—expulsion! Well, Neal—if I am shut out of doors, I must come to Joe or you."

"To me—now, if you will!"

"Not just yet. Only threats, Neal, and I can bear them—and brave them, as I have done to-night. They'll only think to-night that I have run away from Mr. Sweeny."

"Who's Mr. Sweeny?"

"Oh! the old rival in the pork-butcher line," laughed Carry spasmodically; "I'll tell you about him, too, at Joe's house. We'll go with Joe, Neal, dear," she said; "you must not think afterwards that I kept back anything which might have deterred you from making me your wife. Fair with you, Neal, as you with me."

"Why should I think otherwise?"

"I don't know," she said hysterically, "but everyone thinks ill of me."

"Never mind," said Neal, pressing her arm to his side, "we can put up with the opinions of people about whom we care nothing. I am sorry to find you so low-spirited."

"Try and like Joe—I have been hoping lately that when Joe knows you, and you and I have a house of our own, that we shall make a different man of him. He is so easily turned to good."

And to evil she might have said with equal justice to Joseph, who not participating in this hurried dialogue, was standing against a lamp-post whistling plaintively and soberly. Joe had a liking for support, and always reclined against walls or posts—physically as well as morally, he could not keep quite straight.

Carry Webber and Neal, preceded by Joe, went along the Borough Road to the streets on its left, a nest of fever-haunted, poverty-stricken streets and alleys crowded between Southwark Road, Borough Market, and the Borough. Here into Globe Court, a darker and fouler passage than the rest, went Neal and his lady-love, Joe apologizing every few yards for the locality.

"It's only shelter from the rain, Mister Galbraith," he said pausing at the last house, "and you'll see the giantess for nothing."

"See whom?"

"My Investment—Mrs. Webber. Oh! here she is!"

Joe's Investment opened the door and looked aghast at the arrivals.

"All right, my dear. It's only my sister and her young man—friends of ours come to say goodbye before we start upon our tour."

"Friends of yours are welcome, Joe."

"Why, of course they are! This way."

Into the front room, dimly lighted by a sputtering rushlight—an ill-furnished room, with windows broken and the draught whistling through them; with bare and dirty boards; an open cupboard, with

its door hanging by one hinge, and poverty grinning from its shelves—together a deplorable domicile, at which Neal stood aghast. Even Carry was taken off her guard.

“Oh ! so bad as this, Joe!”

“For the present,” said Joe, airily ; “we shall take a turn soon. I haven’t a doubt of a run of luck with the good lady. Don’t sit down yet, Selina, but let them have a good look at you—they’re relations, almost both of ’em.”

Selina remained standing as adjured, somewhat proud of her position, and of being the central object of attraction. She was a hard-featured young woman, seven feet high at least—a worn-faced woman, with a long scraggy neck, that gave her a giraffe aspect, and with thin arms terminating in bony hands of considerable size. Altogether a bony woman for the matter of that—thin by nature, and rendered thinner by necessity.

She looked shyly at Carry Webber, and brightened up as Carry shook hands with her.

“I have heard of you before,” said Carry ; “I am glad to see you, to think that Joe has some one to take care of him at last.”

“I do my best. It ain’t much” she added with

an embarrassed laugh; "will you sit down, Miss Webber? Will your young man sit down?"

Miss Webber took one chair, and Miss Webber's young man the other, till Neal found that host and hostess were left standing by this course. Neal rose at once, but the giantess seated herself comfortably on one corner of the table, whilst her lord and husband found the mantelpiece to rest his back against.

"Keep your seat, Miss Webber's young man," she said in a gruff voice—she was always subject to gruffness, it may be premised—"this is handy for me, and Joe likes to rest about, don't you, dear?"

"Pretty well. Does anybody mind my smoking here?"

Nobody expressing an objection, Joe lit his pipe, whilst the giantess took up an enormous muslin robe from the table, and went on with her repairs.

"You mustn't mind my working, Miss Webber, but we're off into the country the day after tomorrow. There's a horse fair, and we've gone shares with the spotted boy, and the man with the sarpents. We calculate on getting on this summer, Joe and I."

"Yes, the winter's over, girl, and we're all right enough. Lord bless us all, we shall get on famously!"

"It's been a hard fight through the winter, though it's not quite done yet; but we got through it somehow, and Joe had a berth for a fortnight at the Vic, in the pantermine, and then he took a little drop too much, and the manager wouldn't stand it, or he would have been on now—wouldn't you, Joe?"

"Oh! the clown fellow was jealous," said Joe; "he thought I made too much of my part in the opening—that was it! It was all very fine to talk about drinking—that's everybody's excuse when they want to run *me* down."

"Not mine, Joe."

"Well, you've put up with me at present," said Joe; "I must say that for you. Selina, I don't think, talking about drink, that we're doing the genteel by our visitors."

Selina turned pale at this hint, and shook her head.

"I'm afraid, Joe, that it won't run to it—I'll see."

She walked to the mantelpiece, took a small pile of coppers therefrom, and began to count them in a stage whisper.

“There’s only——”

“I don’t care a button what there is!” said Joe, fiercely; “pass over the money, and let us show our visitors that we appreciate their coming here. We shall have plenty of money next week—I’d bet a trifle that we’ve ten pounds in our pockets!”

“I wouldn’t build too much on that,” said Mrs. Webber, giving the money to him.

Neal broke in here, to protest against money being expended on refreshment for them; and Carry seconded his protest. But Mr. Webber was firm, and would take no denial. Neal saw their poverty, and read regrets at their appearance in Mrs. Webber’s eyes; he hastened to say that he was the stranger there, and, as a new-comer, pleaded to be allowed to “pay his footing!”

Mr. Joseph Webber looked disparagingly at our hero.

“I don’t know whether you call that genteel manners,” he said; “but I don’t. It ain’t fashionable in Globe Court to let visitors pay for their own drink, and isn’t Globe Court hospitality. I’m very glad to see you here—both of you—especially Carry, who stands by me like a trump still; and I want to show you that I feel the honour!”

Joe departed, and Mrs. Webber began to cry immediately the door was closed behind him. Neal sat on his chair, biting the ivory end of a walking-stick, in which he had recently speculated, and feeling uncomfortable and out of place, even with Carry at his side. Neal had met with reverses in life, but he had not experienced absolute poverty, and its presence in that room distressed him. He would have preferred not to know anything concerning Carry's relations, but he fancied that he could already estimate correctly the character of Joseph Webber. Carry had been led away by Joe's wrongs and misfortunes; he, undisturbed by them, could imagine that Joe had brought them on himself.

He was at a loss for a subject for discussion, and sat staring at the weeping giantess.

"Is anything the matter?" Carry asked at last.

"Not much—it's my way, miss," she said; "I always cry when Joe's inclined to go the figure, because he won't think of the consequences, and he don't care for them a bit. He's sorry in his way afterwards, and he's as good hearted a little fellow as ever breathed; but, oh! good Lord, he will drink awful when he's got a chance; and

when I married him, I married trouble!"

"Poor Joe!" murmured Carry; "you might have expected that."

"I wasn't afeard of it," she answered, drying her eyes by a vigorous knuckly application thereto; "we were a match, for he married trouble with me. He took me as an Investment, for my father had a carawan of his own, and made a good deal out of me—and I took a fancy to Joe—and it was a runaway match between us. And when we didn't get on well by our two selves, and I turned out a bad spec for Joe in all respects, he never murmured, but was just the same easy cove as ever."

"I never knew him murmur," said Carry; "he should have been a happier man."

"He's as happy as the day is long, for that matter," said the giantess; "he never frets at bad luck, because he's always thinking he's seen the worst of everything, and luck's coming round again. I wish he *would* fret sometimes!"

It was evident to Neal, that this tall, ungainly being loved Mr. Joseph Webber with an affection as odd and ungainly as herself; but Neal was very tired of her "maunderings," and wondered

now why Carry had not preferred the shelter of some doorway to her sister-in-law's company. He thought also, with a shudder, that he was to be related shortly to this giantess by marriage, and might have some day to ask her to tea with him and Carry; and he wondered what his father—who had been somewhat of a proud man in his best estate—would think of her.

Joe returned whilst he was ruminating, and set triumphantly a pewter vessel of gin and two glasses on the table.

"I could only borrow two glasses—but Mr. Galbraith won't mind drinking after Carry," he said knowingly; "I understand what young people are—I don't suppose there's anybody living who understands the way of the world better than I do."

"If you only understood how to make money in it, Joe," said the giantess; "that'd be a precious sight better."

"You've been getting low whilst I've been gone," he said; "backbiting your husband to these good people here. Well, that's very proper and natural, for I'm not a credit to you; and you see"—turning to Neal suddenly—"this was a

sordid match on my part; I speculated in Mrs. Webber's proportions, taking a mean advantage of her affection for me to make her my lawful wife, and entirely my property. The governor cut up very roughly—didn't he, Selina?"

"Well he might. I was a great loss to him—though I say it myself, there wasn't a man or woman in the trade a patch upon me," she said proudly, after tilting off the glass of gin that her husband had proffered her.

Mrs. Webber objected to spending money on spirituous liquids; but when the money was spent, she liked her fair share, or to keep more than a fair share from her husband—it was doubtful which.

Carry and Neal feigned to partake of the gin that had been provided for them, for Joseph Webber was obtrusively persistent, and anxious to be hospitable. So Carry and Neal sipped at the gin glass, and sat with the water in their eyes, listeners rather than talkers. They were both in a false position—Carry felt this, too, after a while, when her brother and the giantess had drunk their gin, and become extraordinarily loquacious. After the gin, Mrs. Webber was as sanguine as her husband of the good fortune to be found at

the horse fair; and they talked about their prospects incessantly for an hour, until Joe's dim faculties began to perceive that the subject was a trifle too wearisome for his guests.

"But you must tell the old lady and me about *your* prospects now, Carry," said Joseph; "we've had the talk long enough, and we should like to hear how you two managed to fall in love with each other, and what the governor said about it, and what you mean to do? As for Selina, I never knew such a woman for love stories in my life; she lives upon 'em, and wastes a fortune in penny numbers!"

"The fair sex, Joe, is always fond of love stories," said Selina, at work now in ironing out her muslin "properties," and going through eccentric evolutions with the iron, owing to the gin.

But Carry had not much to say concerning her love-story now; her face was flushed, and she regretted Neal's presence there. She told them that she was engaged to Mr. Galbraith, and that her father was averse to the match; and then inquired if the snow were falling still, and whether if, under any circumstances, Neal and she had not better think of home.

Neal was ready—he was glad to be quit of the place, even at the expense of curtailing his interview with Carry ; and he rose at Carry's hint.

“We're always ready to help you two,” said Joe ; “we shall be back here in a month, and glad to see you again, and help you in our way, if you want help. I know what the governor is when his back's up ; and you may have to make a bolt of it, Carry, and get married. And if it's by license, why, as you're a minor, we shall have to work it somehow. Always rely on us for help.”

“I'd help till I dropped !” said Selina, enthusiastically. “You've been good to Joe, more good than he deserves ; and I'm another friend through thick and thin, remember !” And down came the flat iron emphatically, to add its further testimony to Mrs. Webber's sentiments.

A little more desultory conversation before departure—the giantess embracing Carry like a sister, and Joe leading our hero into a remote corner, and taking him confidentially by the button-hole.

“You couldn't lend Carry's brother ten shillings for a month—could you ?” he asked confidentially.

"I'll try—*for once*," added Neal prudently.

Then he opened his purse, and took a half-sovereign therefrom—Joseph Webber intently interested in the operation.

"Or if you could make it fifteen shillings it would help us wonderfully; and, as there's no doubt of our paying you, it can't signify a button."

"Shall we say fifteen shillings, then?"

"If you don't mind, I'll thank you very much!"

Neal tendered the fifteen shillings, which were duly pocketed by Joseph Webber; Carry and the giantess both interested in the action, and watching from the background.

Finally, Carry and Neal quit of them at last, and emerging from Globe Court into a street more wide and less dark. The snow had abated, but the streets were white, wintry and cold.

Carry put her arm through his, and looked Neal intently in the face.

"Well?"

"Well, Carry?" said Neal, with a forced smile.

"What do you think of those people?"

"Well-meaning people, enough, I daresay. I am sorry to find them so poor," replied Neal,

at a loss for a satisfactory answer, and dashing at anything in consequence.

"You will be ashamed of them, Neal," said Carry, with excitement. "No matter how little they may trouble us, you will be always miserable to think that they are related to you. I saw this, and I took you there to-night that you might see for yourself all that you risk in marrying me. Now—give me up!"

"I! Never, Carry!"

"Better for you and me—I shall be a disgrace to you—I am not worthy of you!" she cried; "I have thought it all over lately, and I can but see unhappiness—so much unhappiness!—in our marrying each other."

"Why, Carry, something has really happened at home to excite you thus! Something that you have not told me yet—what is it?"

"My father is very hard and stern—he is determined upon my marriage with that hateful man, and he drags me down to sit with him night after night, and hear his fulsome compliments. I have resisted, and we have had high words together—father and I."

"We must end this!"

"And I—I did think that after all I had better marry Mr. Sweeny than you. I am an ill-tempered girl—you don't know me—I am mad at times, Neal!"

"You would rather marry this Sweeny than me?" said Neal, reproachfully.

"No, no; but his is a coarser mind, and will not be affected by my ways; and—and I would rather make him unhappy than you! Oh! Neal, I am sure that I shall bring you much misery."

"No, much happiness," he cried; "only misery without you. This life of uncertainty is preying upon you—we must end it at once, Carry. I will have no more of it!"

"I cannot bear any more—I am very tired of home," she sighed.

"Soon the new home, and the brighter life then, Carry. We will talk of this next time we meet, and settle everything."

"And you will put up with poor Joe for my sake, now and then?"

"Ah! and learn to like Joe, if you wish it. There, now the sunshine comes back again to the dear face that I love so much."

"And Neal Galbraith talks like the boy, rather

than the man thinking soberly of marriage. God bless you, Neal!"

She flung herself upon him, and cried upon his breast. Yes, she was a weak child enough, spoiled by ill-training, wild, impulsive, even at times incomprehensible, but to be loved and cherished always, Neal thought, as he held her in his arms a moment, standing by the gate of her home in Shepherd Street.

They parted more like lovers than they had left Joe Webber's house, and Neal went home unwavering, and with his heart light. The shadows might be rising here and there, but they were not to affect *his* life. Carry would be his!—and with Carry, all would be radiant enough! Without her, a successful life would be nothing to him; with her, he could bear unsuccessfulness, disreputable relations, everything, to save her from that home wherein she was misunderstood.

He thought no more of Joseph Webber's house in Globe Court—they were shadows there mayhap, but they would not fall upon his path. He was generous as well as Carry—and his was a heart full of its first love.

CHAPTER V.

A FIASCO.

TROUBLED as Neal Galbraith was at this juncture, he had the good sense to keep his troubles to himself. Past habits of life had taught him reticence, and the folly of expecting solace from common-place people. He could have told his father every word, and without a blush, had his father's mind been strong enough ; he could have sought advice from him, and asked him to love Carry as his daughter. But his father was weak, and he was alone in the world ; there was no one whose business it was to interfere or expostulate with him, no one else in whom he felt an entire trust could be put. He was to a certain extent a vain young man, proud of his own judgment, even a little opinionated as to his own cleverness ; he was resolute, stern, and he had not been a boy, he felt assured, for many years past. It never struck him that he had had no experience

in love matters, and that there he was the boy still—all romance and self-abnegation, setting his heroine amongst the angels rather than among woman-kind. In love matters he had not the patience to wait—and Carry being unhappy at home, would have disturbed his patience even had he possessed any.

He might have profited by the advice of Mrs. Higgs, humble and ignorant though she was; still more so by the advice of his senior clerk, quiet, methodical, and prosy as he seemed; but then Neal was not aware that he needed advice, and the perplexities of his love-affair he set down as natural to love affairs in general. His course was plainly indicated—he had made up his mind—he was not a man likely to turn from any resolution that he had formed—and he was too unselfish and unworldly to be scared by the thoughts of a wife to support at one-and-twenty.

In a very quiet, humble way, his salary would be sufficient, and in good time he should work his way upwards. He did not fear, and a small salary with Carry Webber was infinitely better than a small salary without her. To be apart from her was unsettling his business-ideas, and the sooner

suspense was over, the better. Neal sank his pride—for he was prouder than he knew himself—for Carry Webber's sake; his relations would be a carriage-breaker, a woman who had once been his father's housekeeper, and a drunken scamp who earned a little money by exhibiting his wife at fairs; but with all, there was Carry—and without her there was misery! Neal, being sure of this, thought no more of his future relations, and of Carry's jealous anxiety concerning them; he was alert and ready. He had made Carry an offer of his hand, and he was a Galbraith, who never changed his mind.

All this, absurd and grotesque in some respects, and yet, in its reality, pitiable. There have been hot-headed, resolute boys before Neal's time—acting like Neal, rashly, but chivalrous in their rashness, and blind to after troubles. Comedy and Tragedy weaving together wild fragments of lives—Thalia drifting away, and Melpomene, in the shape of marriage troubles, advancing into the foreground; or life one burlesque to the grave's verge. There was Tragedy halting in the rear in this case; if it suited the elucidation of our story, we might catch the flutter of the black robe even

now! But, for a time, we are going on gaily with the lighter muse.

Time went by, then, and these lovers met again and again—the fair weather favouring them once more. Carry had her troubles to relate, or her troubles to set aside, if her mood were a gay one; take them altogether, they were pleasant courting days enough, as they are always, no matter how the story ends. Two or three months after that meeting in Globe Court, and then Carry came like a Pythoness, with a recital of fresh indignities—of the pork-butcher's persistence, and her father's concentrative obduracy.

"I'm to go out with him to-morrow—he's to take me and mother to the Victoria Theatre—to a private box, to see some monstrous melodrama. And he never sits long by me without putting his arm round my waist, Neal, and I hate it!"

"The filthy beast!" ejaculated Neal. "I won't stand that!"

Neal thought of his rights as a lover, and gnashed his teeth with rage. It was quite time this pork-butcher was extinguished. Carry drifted

into other topics, but Neal had made up his mind to judge for himself of Mr. Sweeny's behaviour, and then act accordingly. He would go to the theatre too, he said, and Carry laughed at his determination.

"You who don't like plays, Neal!"

"No—nor pork-butchers!" said Neal, vindictively.

Neal set his father to work on a new plan the next night, stating that he should be late home from business. He disinterred an opera-glass from its slumber at the bottom of his trunk, and took it with him to Shad Thames, placing it on his desk by way of centre ornament.

"Why, what have you got there?" asked Mr. Pike, dreamily surveying the article, and pointing at it with his pen.

"That's an opera-glass of mine, sir. I'm going to the theatre to-night."

"Good gracious! I'm very sorry. I thought I had heard you say that you objected to theatres?"

"I have altered my mind, perhaps," said Neal, affecting a light tone.

"Oh! I hope not—I wouldn't alter my mind,

if I were you ! A young man who has his way to make in the world can't stand too much apart from the frivolities of life. Whatever has made you think of theatres ?”

Neal writhed upon his stool. He wished the subject dismissed, and tried once or twice to turn the conversation into a business channel ; but Mr. Pike was absorbed in his subject, and sat at right-angles from the desk, with his hands upon his knees, watching our hero like a hawk with fishy eyes.

“What theatre are you going to, Neal ?”

“Oh ! the place in the New Cut. How you bother, Mr. Pike !” and Neal dashed his pen into the ink, and splashed his ledger and himself.

“The Victoria Theatre ! Good heaven ! Neal, what for ?”

“Not for amusement, sir !”

Mr. Pike considered himself silenced at last by Neal's decisive tones ; he wheeled round and faced his desk, after one sorrowful look at his fellow-clerk.

“If he had come to tea with his father—this wouldn't have happened,” he muttered ; “and I

ought to have pressed him more. My dear Neal," he cried, spasmodically flying round again, "what are you going for, then?"

"I can't very well explain," said Neal, a little touched by Mr. Pike's face of distress; "it is not for love of melo-drama; it is not that I wish for change of that kind—I'm a little unsettled—that's all. Some day I'll tell you, sir—I can't now."

"Very well, Neal."

Mr. Pike gave up the subject for good; and Neal went to the Victoria Theatre to watch his rival.

From his place in the boxes, by the side of a gentleman in corduroys, who insisted upon keeping his cap on, and disobliging the *élite* in the rear, Neal Galbraith sat and watched. He was indifferent to melo-drama, though he remembered that his greatest pleasure when a boy was to be treated to the county theatre in holiday times. But he *was* a boy then, with nothing on his mind, and a father to take care of him; now he was a self-willed man, with a father to take care of, and an influential rival to oppose him in his one desire.

That rival came at last, accompanied by Carry Webber and her mother. An hour afterwards, the lumpish features of Mr. Webber, senior, was seen at the back of the private box; Mr. Webber standing with his hands in his pockets, and his hat pulled down to his eyebrows as usual. Neal made use of his opera-glass then, and watched proceedings—Carry Webber sat between Mr. Sweeny and her mother; the latter absorbed in the play, and forgetful of “surroundings.” Mr. Sweeny was a broad-faced, red-cheeked, jolly-looking man, with hair as wiry and perpendicular as the bristles of his own hogs; a man who laughed loudly at every joke of the comedian’s, and even turned purple in the face with hilarity. And he *was* attentive to Carry, and obtrusive with his arms; lolling against her now and then, and nudging her at all the best jokes with a free-and-easy elbow. Neal saw Carry draw herself away and smile to him across the house; but Neal did not smile in return; he ground his teeth, and anathematized the pork-butcher between them. The rival was in his place, tormenting her to whom he had vowed to be true—“the devil take him!” muttered Neal.

Mr. Webber, looking round the house, detected

Neal at last, and scowled at him ; but Neal was undaunted by the scowl, even by the clenched hand which at last was shaken in his direction. Presently Mr. Webber, still surveying him, leaned forward, and whispered to the pork-butcher, who looked towards Neal also—not ferociously, as might have been expected, but with a broad grin, that made Neal's blood boil. Mr. Sweeny was evidently congratulating himself on their difference of position just then.

Neal did not understand the play; from beginning to end he only looked twice in the direction of the stage ; once when there was a more vociferous shout of laughter than usual from the "house" at the comedian appearing in female habiliments too short for him—a good joke which goes down at "houses" further west still—and a second time when Mrs. Webber caught her daughter by the arm, and then flung up her mittened hands in horror. She had sat like a sullen Sphinx in spectacles till then.

Neal turned his glass to the stage for the second time, and detected Joseph Webber, one of a band of brigands, about to hurl the hero of the drama into a cataract—a brigand, who was still Joseph

Webber, standing with his back to the wing, and letting his brother supers do all the hard work.

Neal was still regarding Joe, when Joe's father suddenly poked at him over the partition behind with his umbrella.

"Come out here a moment, will you?" he said, in a fierce interrogative.

Neal obeyed, and made his way to the lobby, proudly and defiantly.

"I've told you to cut this game, and you haven't?"

"I told you that I should be true to your daughter, and I shall!"

"True to my daughter!" mimicked Mr. Webber, as perhaps he had a right to mimic any attempt at fine sentiment; "I've heard all that nonsense, and I won't have any more of it. Perhaps you don't know that Carry's to be married to Mr. Sweeny next month."

"No—I don't know that, sir," gasped Neal, still struggling to be respectful to Carry's father.

"Well, she is. It's settled, and you needn't make a fool of yourself any longer."

"It can't be settled without Miss Webber's consent."

"Oh! yes it can—it is. Next month, as I'm a living man, she'll be Mrs. Sweeny. Do you see those fellows on the stage there?"

"Yes."

"One of those louts is my son. I told him some years ago that if he ever robbed me again, I'd turn him out of doors—he robbed me, and out he went. I'm a man of my word, sir."

"It might have been as well——" and then Neal paused.

"If I hadn't been," corrected Mr. Webber, "why don't you speak out like a man?"

"Sir, I will speak out like a man," said Neal, fiercely. "I don't know whether you treated your son well or badly—I don't care—but I know that you are not acting justly by your daughter Carry. I can make her happy, and am more suitable for her than that bloated idiot by her side—and he shan't have her, sir, do what you will!"

"Oh! that's it!"

"He shan't have her!—you have no right to set him there annoying Carry by his rudeness, if you

were fifty times her father. Let me pass, sir."

Neal swept by Mr. Webber in his rage, and ran down the stairs into the street. The box to which he had pointed was empty; Mrs. Webber had lost her interest in the play after her son's appearance, and wanted to go home. Neal was in the street before them, harassed by a motherly creature in a white apron, who displayed a regiment of trotters in a basket, and turned him heart-sick.

"Be off!—take those things away!" cried the exasperated Neal.

"A penny each, sir—seven for sixpence—there, you may have that one for three fardens!"

And she held up a malformed limb between her thumb and finger to the amazed eyes of Neal Galbraith, who backed away from her, and met Mrs. Webber, Carry and Mr. Sweeny at the door.

"Hi! cab!" shouted Mr. Sweeny to a passing vehicle, which stopped at once; "now, Carry, my dear, allow me the honour?"

Neal must have been out of his senses that night to have forgotten himself so completely; his pride had taken offence at Mr. Webber's assump-

tion of superiority, and the stern interdict upon his love-suit. He faced Mr. Sweeny, dark and lowering, and with his hands clenched.

"Do you know who I am?" he cried, "and what business I want here? I am engaged to Miss Webber, and your place is somewhere else. Find it, and go!"

"Trotters, gentlemen!—trotters for the ladies!" cried an insinuating voice behind them.

"Don't come your bluster over me," said Mr. Sweeny, who had recoiled a step, however, and turned a shade less ruddy; "you ought to know better how to behave yourself, whoever you are."

"Oh! Neal, pray go away now," said Carry.

"I will see you to your cab," said Neal, hoarsely—"stand back, sir!"

His rival was still in his way, and he thrust him aside with an angry hand; this was Neal's "dark hour," and his rage was uppermost, and lowered him. This was the "temper," concerning which Mrs. Higgs, at an earlier date, had made inquiries.

"I never saw such impudence!" ejaculated Mrs. Webber.

"Keep back, sir!" said Neal, threateningly, as Mr. Sweeny once more advanced, red in the face this time.

"Trotters, gentlemen?—*yah!* Lord save 'em, there they go!"

And there they certainly went, basket and all, on to the miry pavement, under the cab wheels, into the road. Mr. Sweeny, who lacked not courage, had flung himself suddenly towards Neal, kicking out one leg behind as he advanced, and meeting with the bottom of the trader's basket in consequence. Mr. Sweeny paused at the cry of distress, and Neal, kicking away sundry trotters in his progress, led Carry to the cab, and placed her in it.

"Don't stop to quarrel," cried Carry—"if you love me, go!"

Neal glanced round at his rival arguing with an excited woman, whose maternal aspect had all vanished, stepped hastily aside to allow of the entrance of Mrs. Webber, who sniffed at him disparagingly in transit, and then, meeting Carry's appealing look once more, walked slowly and reluctantly away, praying for his rival to follow him

into the Waterloo Road. But no one followed him as he walked homewards.

Half-way down the Waterloo Road, a cab passed him with half a dozen gamins clinging to the sides, indifferent to futile lashings at them from the cabman's whip, and shouting derisive epithets, in which the word "trotters" very frequently occurred. Neal repented then of his folly, and cursed it for bringing its share of ridicule to Carry. But with his repentance he was none the less angry or dissatisfied. He went on talking to himself in a wild fashion, befitting more his father than him.

"I have had enough of this—I must act at once, or she escapes me! She shall be my wife before another week is out—I swear it!"

It was an oath as rash as had been his conduct of that night, and his guardian angels shrank away and left him to himself—his bad, stern self, in which he did not believe. Thalia went away on tiptoe, with her finger to her lips; and Melpomene crept slowly to his side, and kept pace with him homewards. Life would commence with him from that day—all before had been but the prologue leading up to this.

He thought so then. Looking back, a different man to him we have attempted to depict, he thinks so now !

•

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

